

UNIVERSITÉ DE SHERBROOKE

Faculté d'éducation

BALANCING VOICES AND VIEWS IN SOCRATIC CIRCLE SEMINARS: A
SELF-STUDY

par

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A SELF-STUDY

Tollof Nelson (Ph.D)

a été évalué par un jury composé des personnes suivantes :

Mme Caroline Gwyn-Paquette Directrice de recherche

Mme Lynne Thomas Autre membre du jury

Essai accepté le _____

OVERVIEW

Object of study

My research revolves around Socratic Circle Seminars (SCSs) which are intellectual conversations and democratic discussions carried out between students and centered on exploring and interpreting common texts (Adler, 1982; Lambright, 1995; Copeland, 2005). This form of qualitative research and practitioner inquiry (Samaras, 2015) draws upon my 15 years of experience in implementing SCSs in Enriched English as a Second-Language (EESL) classrooms at the Académie Ste-Thérèse in Québec (2001-2017). Specifically, this Self-Study focuses on how I conducted three SCSs in my EESL classes in Secondary 5 (94 learners) in June 2017.

Problem

Despite all my classroom experience with SCSs, my recalibration of practice, my production of resources as well as my outreach to the teaching and research community (Nelson, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2015a, 2015b), I still face the recurrent problem of uneven student participation as well as the unbalanced expression of viewpoints. This situation is explored from the vantage point of “living educational theory” (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2003; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Samaras, 2011) by framing and reframing typical problems as disjunctions or discrepancies between practice and belief.

General and Specific Research Objectives & Hypothesis

Generally, I seek to identify what needs to be done to get all learners to participate more actively in Socratic Circle Seminars so that the process of meaningful and democratic dialogue includes more voices and balances more views. Specifically, I will be looking to better align my practice with my belief by identifying “avoidable obstacles” through more strategic teaching.

Research Design and Methodology

This research corresponds to “Reflexive Analysis of One’s Professional Practice” (Paillé, 2007). In terms of underlying methodological guidelines, I am applying the “Five Foci” framework of Self-Study Teacher Research (Samaras, 2011, p.94): 1) personal situated inquiry; 2) critical collaborative inquiry; 3) improved learning; 4) transparent and systemic research process; 5) knowledge generation and presentation.

Data Analysis, Interpretation & Assessment

I collected and catalogued three types of data (Hendricks, 2006) from a variety of sources and in a variety of formats: 1) *teacher-produced artefacts*; 2) *observational data*; and 3) *inquiry data*. I employed “constant comparative method” (Creswell, 2007), presented the evidence into emerging and converging themes and later conducted a categorical analysis of the evidence. The data analysis and interpretation as well as my methodology was assessed by my Critical Friend Team to increase validity, ensure transparency and secure trustworthiness of findings.

Summary conclusions

My findings show that I had been unintentionally short-circuiting my own better intentions about using SCSs to implement student-centered learning and participation. The most significant finding of my research shows the necessity of adopting a more pro-active coaching role as a teacher and developing very flexible and differentiated coaching skills.

Originality of contribution

Beyond this specific educational context of second-cycle high-school EESL teaching in Québec, this study would be of special interest for those who wish to implement SCSs in their own classrooms in a more systematic way. Novice and seasoned teachers alike who read this study would be better prepared to understand tested practices that shape stronger participation in student-centered, democratic and academic conversations.

RÉSUMÉ

Objet d'étude

Ce projet de recherche comporte une analyse réflexive entourant ma pratique dans l'enseignement des « Séminaires de Cercles Socratiques » (SCSs) au deuxième cycle du secondaire en tant qu'enseignant d'Anglais langue-seconde enrichi à l'Académie Ste-Thérèse au Québec. Les SCSs sont des conversations intellectuelles et discussions démocratiques centrées sur l'exploration et l'interprétation de sujets et de textes plus complexes (Adler, 1982; Lambright, 1995; Copeland, 2005). Plus précisément, ce projet de recherche qualitative propose une auto-analyse de ma pratique pédagogique (Samaras, 2015) avant, pendant et après trois SCSs pilotés dans des cours d'anglais enrichis en 5^e secondaire (94 apprenants) au mois de juin 2017.

Problématique

Malgré 15 ans d'expérience en classe avec les SCSs, le partage de mon expertise dans la communauté de la recherche en enseignement au Québec (Nelson, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2015a, 2015b), la production d'outils didactiques, ainsi que le réinvestissement de mes réflexions dans l'action pédagogique, les problèmes portant sur la participation active ainsi que l'expression plus équilibrée des perspectives multiples persistent. Cette situation est explorée à partir de la perspective d'un enseignant qui cherche à recadrer des problèmes typiques en tant que divergences entre ses croyances et sa pratique, selon le courant de « living educational theory » (McNiff, Lomax, Whitehead, 2003 ; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006 ; Samaras, 2011).

Objectif général et objectif spécifique de recherche ainsi que l'hypothèse

Généralement, je cherche à identifier ce qui doit être fait afin de favoriser un plus grand nombre d'apprenants à participer dans les SCSs pour enclencher un processus de dialogue démocratique signifiant qui inclut plus de voix et balance plus de perspectives. Plus

précisément, je cherche à mieux aligner ma pratique avec mes croyances tout en identifiant les « obstacles potentiels » à travers un enseignement plus stratégique.

Modèle d'essai et méthodologie de recherche

Ce projet de recherche correspond à « une auto-analyse réflexive de sa pratique professionnelle » (Paillé, 2007). En termes méthodologiques, ce projet applique le cadre « Cinq Axes » ou « Five Foci Framework of Self-Study Teacher Research » (Samaras, 2011, p.94) qui comporte les principes récurifs et herméneutiques suivants : 1) investigation personnelle et située; 2) investigation critique et collaborative; 3) apprentissage amélioré; 4) processus systémique et transparent de recherche; 5) production et présentation du savoir.

Analyse, interprétation et validation des données

J'ai récolté et compilé trois types de données (Hendricks, 2006) provenant d'une variété de sources et de formats : 1) des artefacts produits par l'enseignant; 2) des données observées; 3) des données d'évaluation. J'ai utilisé la « méthode constante et comparative » (Creswell, 2007), présenté des thèmes émergents de mes données afin d'en faire une analyse catégorique. Des membres de mon équipe d'amis critiques (Critical Friends Team) ont validé la méthodologie utilisée, ainsi que l'analyse et l'interprétation de données afin d'assurer la transparence, garantir la fiabilité et augmenter la crédibilité de ma recherche.

Conclusions sommaires

Mes découvertes démontrent que j'étais en train de court-circuiter ma propre vision socio-constructiviste de l'apprentissage et l'enseignement au sein des SCSs. La découverte la plus probante de ma recherche porte sur la nécessité d'accorder une place plus importante au rôle de coach-enseignant. De plus, je dois développer davantage des compétences flexibles et différenciées en coaching.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this essay to my father, Christopher B. Nelson, and to my grandfather, Charles A. Nelson, who taught me the value of sober inquiry, humble introspection and radical Socratic questioning.

Special Thanks

I would like to thank Caroline Mary Gwyn-Paquette who patiently supervised, coached and directed the entire process of this Self-Study Teacher Research, at the Department of Pedagogy, *Université de Sherbrooke*.

I would like to thank my EESL students at the Académie Ste-Thérèse for participating so actively and cooperatively in this research project. Your assessments and conversations were illuminating, and I learned much from your comments. I would like to thank members of the administration of my school at the Académie Ste-Thérèse for allowing my classroom to become a research observatory for the Reflective Practice of Teaching with Socratic Circle Seminars over the past 16 years. I am especially grateful to Jean-Pierre Dufresne who patiently found the best ways to film my classroom practice.

I would also like to extend a special word of thanks to my incredible team of critical friends who helped me complete this project all along the way, reading my proposals, responding to invitations to observe classroom practice, writing memos, recording interviews as well as validating my own research design, methodology, interpretation of data and findings. To my colleagues at the Académie Ste-Thérèse (Maria, Arielle and Karen) as well as to my mentor from Collège Sacre-Coeur Externat Saint-(Joshua), your presence, encouragement and professional advice were invaluable. Finally, a special word of thanks goes out to my pedagogical counsellor, Anne, for your fresh perspective, professional insight and wisdom.

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Balancing Voices and Views in Socratic Circle Seminars: A Self Study

Let him that would move the world, first move himself. -Socrates

CHAPTER 1 : PRESENTATION OF THE GENERAL PROBLEM OF RESEARCH

1.0 Introduction

Ever since Plato's philosophical dialogues dramatized Socrates as an exemplary "hero and midwife of thought", educators have modeled Socratic questioning and dialogue over the centuries as a lifelong habit of critical thinking, intellectual inquiry, interpretive reading and academic discussion and writing (Philips, 2001). My proposed research revolves around Socratic Seminars or Socratic Circles which are intellectual conversations carried out between students and centered on exploring and interpreting common texts (Adler, 1982; Lambright, 1995; Copeland, 2005). This chapter will explain how these seminars fit in with the socio-constructivist vision of the Quebec Education Program (QEP) (Ministère de l'éducation (MELS, 2007), and explain some of the pedagogical processes and didactic tools for carrying out these seminars in the context of my own ongoing reflective practice. Finally, I will describe the general recurrent problem of eliciting a balance of student voices and views while conducting these academic conversations.

1.1 Why implement Socratic Circle Seminars in the first place?

The Quebec Education Program (QEP) supports a student-centered paradigm of learning based on the belief that, across all disciplines, students need to take charge of their learning, co-construct knowledge with peers and become more responsible for developing critical, creative and collaborative thinking (MELS, 2007). Considering these ambitious goals and orientations of the QEP, I would argue that there is a need for “maieutic” approaches in teaching, that is to say, modes of instruction that help students “bring ideas to birth” by learning the art of asking questions of inquiry, leading deeper discussions, becoming more “Socratic” in the examination of preconceived notions, opinions and thoughts (Adler, 1982, 29).

As part of my master’s work in ESL didactics, I recently created an instructional screencast video (Nelson, 2015) that describes how Socratic Circle Seminars fit in with the overall vision of the socio-constructivist paradigm of teaching and learning and how they mobilize, develop and integrate competencies 1,2 & 3 in Enriched English as a Second Language (EESL). For EESL learners they consolidate a vast repertoire of learning and communication strategies, such as activating prior knowledge, taking risks, cooperating with others, tolerating ambiguity, making inferences, establishing connections and synthesizing schemata. Yet, the art of implementing Socratic Circles or Socratic Seminars is rarely put into sustained practice in EESL classrooms in Québec for lack of background

knowledge, training and reflexive practice (Nelson, 2011).

This research draws upon my 15 years of experience in implementing Socratic Circle Seminars in EESL classrooms for students in the second cycle of high school studies at the Académie Ste-Thérèse in Québec (2001-2017). In my first years of teaching at this institution, I immediately sensed a need to develop discussion techniques that provided more student ownership and modes of investigating texts that required higher level thinking skills, due to the academic rigor of our curricula, the strong reliance on teacher-centered models of learning in our department, high parental expectations regarding performance, as well as the advanced level of linguistic competency in our students.

Indeed, the Socratic Circle Seminar model of dialogue and shared inquiry represents a significant departure from established practices of teacher-led discussions, reading circles or debate since they provide greater control to students over the process of their own learning and catalyze deeper hermeneutic discoveries (Nelson, 2008, 2010). In these first years of implementation, students reported to me in rating questionnaires that this type of self-governance over the process of learning immediately appealed to them, strengthened their motivation for interacting orally in EESL and increased their autonomy for understanding interpretative literature.

1.1.1 What are Socratic Circle Seminars?

Socratic Circle Seminars can be described as academic inquiries, democratic discussions, or collaborative conversations that take place after having prepared a close

and critical reading of a short text or a longer novel or play. Classroom furniture is reorganized to accommodate two concentric circles of students who sit either in the inner-circle or outer circle; 12-16 students are grouped in each circle, depending on class-size. The inner-circle engages in a 10-15-minute conversation while the outer circle listens, observes and takes notes. After the inner circle has examined the topics and issues raised by the texts, the second circle provides about 10 minutes of feedback on the relative quality of the dialogue that took place, commenting on individual and group dynamics, reiterating strong ideas or memorable questions, and offering constructive criticism when needed. After this initial period of reflection, the two circles of students change places and roles and the process repeats itself with new voices. This process takes place over a one-hour classroom period. This tri-partite pattern of “discussion-feedback-reversing roles” is essential to keeping the dialogue alive, building community through directed interaction between circles, and ultimately deepening or broadening the overall inquiry through extension, reframing and questioning.

The most frequent point of criticism given by members of the outer-circle concerns uneven student participation; this remark is often followed by declarations that all participants should speak for roughly the same amount of time with no awkward silences. Instead of validating this claim, I tell them that ideally a Socratic Circle Seminar would include a balance of voices from all learners as they inquire deeply and carefully into an issue, explore multiple perspectives, and build strong community and consensus through dialogue. This balance is hard to measure in terms of frequency or duration since balance is also a question of the relative quality of participant contributions, the diversity and variety of the viewpoints expressed and the degree to which the inquiry engages everyone

in negotiating meaningful exchanges.

1.1.2 The problem of uneven student participation and expression

Despite all my classroom experience in conducting Socratic Circle Seminars, my involvement in producing pedagogical and didactic tools to facilitate their implementation (2001-2017), as well as my outreach to the teaching and research community about their nature and value (Nelson, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2015a, 2015b), I still face the recurrent problem of getting all learners to take part in the seminars I conduct so that they feel like they have a role to play in this balance of voices and views. Over and over, I have wrestled with the question of how to raise the number of voices, and balance the views, of students who make meaningful contributions to the conversation in the inner and outer circles of a typical seminar.

Despite the best intentions in preparation before a seminar, management during a seminar and follow-up after a seminar, sometimes the number of students who actually actively contribute to the discussion remains uneven; the number of views expressed remains limited; and the emotional charge of the group seems unbalanced due to the strong and obvious presence of students who talk too much, too little or not at all. In the inner-circle, this manifests itself in a variety of ways: sometimes only 5-7 out of 12-15 individuals actually speak for the full duration of the conversation; sometimes the silence for reflection between discussion points is too heavy to be comfortable or productive and

sometimes silent reflection is so absent that participants actually talk over each other; sometimes strong inner-circle leaders shut down shy students, ignoring their remarks or intimidating them into silence; sometimes; students distract attention so far away from the central issue that it is difficult to recover the opening threads of inquiry. In the outer circle, the problem is slightly different since I require all participants to voice their feedback at least once. Lack of balance can still be felt and it manifests itself in the following ways: whereas some students voice very pointed and insightful remarks, others voice simplistic, vague, repetitive or overly general remarks; some students show evidence of strong listening skills (paraphrasing, quoting or summarizing points) and others seem unable--despite the systematic use of a feedback form--to recall any evidence to support their comments; sometimes students overly praise or overly criticize their peers for their comments to be received in a constructive way.

Understanding the underlying complexity of this problem of uneven student participation will be one objective of this research. Solving or attenuating select aspects of the problem will be another. In the absence of a solution to this problem, I fear that I will continue to be blindly testing a variety of ideas and potentially “turn in circles” without making significant progress in the specific educational context in which this challenge has been encountered. This could undermine the overall credibility of Socratic Circle Seminars among students who have not experienced active engagement in the process of dialogue before, or those who lack commitment because they have not yet been convinced of the benefits of active participation. At the darkest end of the spectrum, it could reflect negatively on me as a teacher who actively and unconsciously is living a contradiction between what he practices and what he preaches, in other words, between the desire to

facilitate learner-inclusion and the actual reality of learner-exclusion.

Beyond this specific educational context of learning, this study would be of special interest for those who wish to implement Socratic Circle Seminars in their own classrooms in a more systematic way. Novice and seasoned teachers alike who read this study would be better prepared to understand tested practices that shape stronger participation in student-centered, democratic and academic conversations. However, teachers and researchers of ESL and EESL in Québec who wish to understand ways to increase student participation in any format of discussion or cooperative structure of conversation would benefit from the insights of this close case-study.

1.1.2.1 Related adjacent issues

There are many adjacent issues related to the general problem of uneven student participation which stem directly from preparation work before a seminar takes place. In my experience, these all have an incidence on the level and quality of student participation and I have worked on all of them without studying their effectiveness systematically:

- selecting the right types of texts to investigate at the right time in learning sequences;
- mobilizing active reading strategies for annotating texts;
- generating discussion points through small buzz-groups before a seminar takes

place;

- clarifying expectations and declaring speech policies for participants;
- explicitly teaching core-skills in academic conversation; and
- nurturing democratic dispositions and discussion habits in students throughout the year.

There are also several adjacent issues that stem from teacher-management during a seminar. Again, these issues exert a direct influence on the level of student participation and they represent recurring challenges with all classes:

- grouping students effectively (inner and outer circles);
- reiterating the value of reflective silence and listening skills;
- handling disruptive students and keeping conversation focused with minimal intervention;
- encouraging student leadership by coaching students in opening and planning discussions;
- ensuring fair timekeeping;
- dealing with disagreements in a constructive manner; and
- managing students who monopolize the conversation.

Finally, there are several adjacent issues that stem from follow-up after a seminar takes place. These have a direct influence on maintaining and increasing the level and quality of student participation for future seminars. These are elements that I have worked on

successfully in the past and which may serve as interesting sources of reflection:

- oral and written reporting on personal and group performance;
- validating student assessments of progress and evaluating student participation;
- helping students to set relevant and attainable goals;
- responding appropriately to students who clearly talked too much as well as to those who “checked-out” from the beginning;
- dealing with learners who seem to be crippled by their personal introversion; and
- rewarding meaningful participation.

1.2 Presentation of the Context in which the Problem is Situated

Parents send their children to the Académie Ste-Thérèse in part because of its strong academic reputation as a private, lay, francophone high-school and because they believe in the overall humanistic vision of its educational project: to nurture the academic, artistic and athletic abilities of young learners and instill in them a longing for excellence in all three spheres. Approximately 1000 students from the lower-Laurentian region of Québec attend the high-school campus (Jacques-About) every year; while predominantly from white, upper-middle class backgrounds, there has been a strong influx of students from multicultural backgrounds. Approximately 10-15% of the student population have special needs and they are integrated into regular classrooms and given special pedagogical support.

Students are placed into one of two streams (ESL or EESL) depending on their level of oral competency, their overall academic motivation and their ability to conduct independent reading; class sizes are 30 students on average. At the Académie Ste-Thérèse, both ESL and EESL are rigorous and demanding programs and students receive close to an hour of instruction every day. There is an Intensive English program in primary school which prepares them for this and there are additional, mandatory English Enrichment classes given to students in secondary 1, 2 and 3. The EESL program is comparable to English Language Arts classes (mother-tongue) given elsewhere across North America in terms of its curriculum, performance benchmarks and student achievements.

The high standards of achievement became obvious to me in my first year of instruction. For example, in typical exams created by the MELs in 2001 for measuring and certifying the development of Competency 1 (Interacts Orally in English) my students in EESL performed with a 95-100% average score, the great majority scoring 100% because they were simply “off the charts” in terms of the evaluation criteria. To use terms from constructivist educational theory, my students needed to be pushed beyond the task requirements of small group discussions (exchanging opinions) into a higher “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1986) that would challenge and build their abilities for oral interaction and push them in new directions.

Moreover, I wanted to help my students develop Competency 2 (Reinvests Understanding of Texts) by generating more autonomy with a reading curriculum constituted by very advanced works of interpretive literature (tragedies and comedies of Shakespeare, satirical poetry, dystopian science-fiction novels, etc.). In the past, focus on

these works had required a teacher-centered approach and I desired to let students discover and to negotiate meaning on their own. I believed that by ensuring peer-support and scaffolding the learning process, this ZDP in both C1 and C2 could be integrated in the task of Socratic Circle Seminars.

I also believed that in terms of cross-curricular competency development, this need for creating the conditions for more advanced discussion and reader autonomy would best be met by developing critical thinking skills. After all, I understood how to bring this about since my educational background in the Great Books Program at St. John's College (B.A., 1989-1993) and my implication in pluridisciplinary research seminars at the Department of Comparative Literature at Université de Montréal (M.A, PhD, 1995-2003) had given me a rich, intimate and sustained experience with academic seminar settings and a desire to transmit the love of learning that comes from creating a community of dialogue. I had also developed a teaching approach characterized by its "principled eclecticism" (Brown, 2012), one of the defining principles of which was the "critical thinking" and "questioning" that I had assimilated from many currents in Contemporary Philosophy, Hermeneutics, Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy.

1.3 Justification for a Self-Study to Solve the Problem

Lacking a community of practitioners with whom I could share my experiences, my own professional growth as a maieutic teacher has taken place over the past 5 years very naturally through various types of feedback that I created for myself: transferring notes from class-planners to a professional journal of reflections, argumentative texts on the development of professional competencies in my electronic portfolio, annual assessments of performance with the administration of my school, end-of-year questionnaires given to students to rate their learning and progress with Socratic Circle Seminars, as well as videotaped sessions of entire seminars.

My professional growth has also stemmed from my efforts to reach out and share best practices with others. In other words, I have very naturally mobilized and developed key components of professional competency #11, *to engage in professional development individually and with others*, by bringing a high level of reflexivity to my teaching practice of Socratic Circle Seminars (MEQ, 2001). For example, I have opened my classroom over the years to colleagues, counsellors, pedagogical directors, editors and mentor-teachers outside the school who have expressed curiosity and interest in observing my recent work at the Académie Ste-Thérèse implementing Socratic Circle Seminars (2006-2017). They have acted as observers and advisors who have helped me to validate my activities and with whom I have exchanged ideas about the pertinence of didactic tools and pedagogical approaches and techniques. I also shared these tools, techniques and approaches with a team of co-authors and editors at La Chenelière Education, and integrated seminar-style tasks and activities into the student workbook and teacher's guide called *Studio*:

Secondary Cycle Two, Year One (Baxter, Beyea, Nelson, and Wright, 2012). With students I have increased my professional lucidity through formal reporting, videotaping and informal questioning of competency development and I have reinvested the results of these observations by reorienting my own teaching activity. Finally, I have regularly reflected on best practices, engaging in “collective professionalism”, by sharing my experience with professional associations in Québec such as SPEAQ, ATEQ and the FEED¹ (Nelson, 2008, 2010, 2015). This kind of ongoing feedback has allowed me to identify strengths and weaknesses in my practice, take stock of comments, make adjustments, set goals and try out new ideas.

For example, many students in my classes in 2014 told me point-blank that they didn’t really see the difference between an academic dialogue and a lunch-table discussion with friends. In response to the need to clarify my expectations and deepen their understanding of this important distinction, much of my recent work has been focused on increasing student competency with what I call the core academic-conversation skills: *planning and focusing on parameters of discussion, supporting ideas with evidence, recapitulating and building on the ideas of others, challenging ideas or received opinions, monitoring understanding and synthesizing conversation points* (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). At the time, I predicted that by clarifying understanding of these academic conversation skills, student participation in Socratic Circle Seminars would increase as well as their overall

¹ These are acronyms for the following associations : *Société pour le perfectionnement de l’enseignement de l’anglais, langue-seconde, au Québec* (SPEAQ) ; *The Association of Teachers of English of Québec* (ATEQ) ; *Fédération des établissements d’enseignement privés* (FEED).

aptitude for talk that goes beyond the typical lunch-table exchanges with friends.

This orientation naturally led to the creation of short mini-lessons on specific skills in “classroom talk that would foster critical thinking and content understanding” (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011; Spiegel, 2005). I developed powerpoint presentations to outline typical prompts for discussion, tools to help students acquire the vocabulary for these types of academic exchanges and finally, a tripartite assessment-tool to monitor the development of these core skills (self-assessment, peer-assessment and teacher-assessment). I shared these tools with colleagues, piloted and even videotaped their use in class. Later, I presented the results of this ongoing work of action-based research and reflection at the annual Springboards Colloquium for the Association for Teachers of English in Québec (ATEQ) in a conference entitled “Self and Peer Assessment for Conversation Skills” (Nelson, 2015b). I took stock of critical comments and praise from peer-colleagues, teachers in other schools, pedagogical counsellors as well seasoned staff working on English programs at the Ministry of Education. In 2016, I decided to make several adjustments in the overall format of this assessment-tool as well as in my method of its presentation and use in class.

While very useful and pedagogically sound as a tool for strengthening the metacognitive ability to monitor conversations as well as the progression and application of communication skills and strategies, this assessment tool did not fulfill my hopes for more balanced and inclusive student participation. It did seem to help the big-talkers to regulate the frequency, duration and quality of their remarks because it forced them to objectify participation. However, it did not seem to support the more introverted or

reluctant learners in terms of their future engagement in conversations. In fact, I observed that for some students, especially reluctant or timid speakers, it created a new challenge since the bar for what constituted intelligent conversation was raised and the fear of looking foolish or incompetent during a seminar discussion was brought even more clearly to the fore. Instead of facilitating participation in oral interaction I had inadvertently created a new barrier.

This example at once illustrates and justifies the pertinence of conducting Self-Study Teacher Research for addressing this issue. I am puzzled about the persistence of the problem of uneven or unbalanced student participation and I feel the need to look again at taken-for-granted aspects of my practice which may contradict my overall goals for engaging all learners in the process of dialogue. As a teacher I am interested in building my efficacy in the classroom and I already strive to make my practice explicit to myself and to others. As a measure of my own commitment to personal professional accountability, I feel the need to demonstrate that I can, in the words of John Loughran, “learn from the challenges created by my own actions” (cited in Samaras, 2001, p.17). I also want to become an agent of my own learning and “bring about reform initiatives while collaborating with colleagues to improve daily and long-term work with students” (Samaras, 2011, p.17). Of course, the immediate applicability of the results of this study which could be “reinvested in action” make this Self-Study work an important touchstone to my development of professional competency #11.

1.4 Question or General Objective of Research

The general objective of this Self Study Teacher Research is learning how to address uneven and unbalanced student participation in Socratic Circle Seminars. This can be reformulated as an affirmative goal that responds to the specific pedagogical need and context I have described: What needs to be done to get all learners to participate more actively in Socratic Circle Seminars so that the process of meaningful and democratic dialogue includes more voices and balances more views?

1.5 Concluding Statement

One challenge of this kind of action-based research, based on the analytic reflection of my teaching activity at the Académie Ste-Thérèse with second-cycle high school learners in EESL, stems from the difficulty of objectifying my own experience and avoiding the risk of falling into complacent autobiography or mere introspection (Paillé, 2007, pp.143-144). This challenge can be met effectively by exercising critical judgement throughout the process, adopting a systematic methodology for examining the problem, using a mixed methods approach for collecting results, alternating reflection and reinvestment of the results of my self-analysis in classroom action, relating this renewed activity to pertinent literature and research on the subject of student participation, and finally, drawing conclusions and reflections that relate back to some of the larger implications in ESL and EESL didactics, pedagogy and research. Before discussing research methodology and

methods, however, it is necessary to theorize the problem of uneven participation and unbalanced expression of viewpoints in SCSs within a larger and more finely-tuned conceptual framework.

CHAPTER 2 : CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, PARADIGMS AND MODULES

2.0 Introduction

I would like to start by situating the conceptual framework for this project of Self-Study within the research paradigm of qualitative research and practitioner inquiry in education. I will briefly share a few ontological assumptions about the nature of the “self” and a few epistemological considerations about how it can be understood or “studied” within the growing field of Self-Study Teacher Research. I will then relate this paradigm to two well-established currents in education and educational theory and research: the first concerns what I will call the *Socratic Turn* in secondary and higher education going back to the turn of the 20th century; the second concerns a branch of critical theory that I will call the *Critical Theory of Democratic Discussion*. I will briefly review these insofar as they shed light on the general research objective announced in Chapter 1: how to solve the problem of uneven and unbalanced student participation in Socratic Circle Seminars.

Following Maxwell’s proposal for the qualitative research design of the conceptual framework (Chapter 3, 2005), I will construct this framework or theory of “what is going on” in my teaching practice in a brief sequence of “modules” that show how these two currents of existing theory relate to other important sources of theory; namely, the “intimate scholarship²” that grows directly out of my own experiential knowledge, pilot exploratory research and thought experiments (Maxwell, 2005, p.37). This reflection,

² This term was coined by Mary Lynn Hamilton and Stefinee Pinnegar in a seminal article describing Self-Study and S-STEP research as a field that creates bridges between personal, vulnerable scholarship and the larger research conversation: “Intimate Scholarship in Research: An Example from Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices Methodology”, *LEARNIng Landscapes*, Vol. 8, No.1, Autumn 2014.

recalibration and questioning of my teaching practice will set the groundwork for the formulation of my specific research question and hypothesis.

2.1 Paradigm of Qualitative Research and Practitioner Inquiry

Self-study scholars emerged in the wake of a wide variety of earlier shifts in currents of research work, such as teacher inquiry, reflective practice and action research. Collectively these currents represent a paradigm shift in educational research with its earlier quasi-exclusive focus on scientific approaches based on doctrines of positivism (Cole and Knowles, 1996; Samaras, 2011). In other words, this paradigm shift represented an epistemological groundswell of voices expressing dissatisfaction with the academic status quo and its injunction to produce research “meeting criteria of objectivity, measurement and quantification, predictability and generalizability and (its need to) be presented in detached and impersonal ways” (Cole and Knowles, 1996, p.4). These studies took the form of a research movement that was gradually formalized from the 1990s and into the present day through symposiums, special interest groups (S-STEP), international conferences, and the production of handbooks and professional journals (Samaras & Freese, 2006).

Collectively, these studies fall within the genre of qualitative research and focus on subjective experience (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Despite differences in research outcomes, these studies also fall under the conceptual umbrella of “practitioner inquiry”

which is widely accepted and understood as a way of regrouping related research models such as teacher inquiry, teacher-as-researcher, reflective practice and action research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004; Grossman, 2005). Self-study is distinguished from these research models by its unique methodological components, including its goals and techniques. For example, in action research the goal of the “action” is a change in the classroom, whereas in self-study research the goal is in a reframed understanding of one’s role and its incidence on student learning. Reflective practice, to give another example, is now seen as one of many techniques used by self-study scholars in this reframing process (Samaras, 2011, p.57).

2.1.1 What is the Nature of the “Self” in *Self-study*?

Anecdotal experience and professional research literature on teaching confirms that the teaching self is more complex than the image of the consumer and disseminator of information or the pedagogical technician (Schön 1983; Ayers, 1993, Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Palmer, 2007). According to Stremmel, “a teacher is, among other things, first and foremost a questioner” (2007, p.1). Beyond professional descriptions, I would posit on the level of ontological assumptions that the being of the self is constituted by its ability to raise questions, to put into question, and through the process of questioning to renew itself continuously.

The tradition of Socratic questioning, itself, built on the credo that the “unexamined life

is not worth living”, brings this notion of the self as questioner into powerful focus. Plato’s dialogues about Socrates’ courage to teach through questioning of others can be seen as a model to emulate in the questioning of the teaching-self generally: the teacher-questioner who courageously raises questions about problems related to his own professional identity in the context of the classroom-cave, who puts into question vulnerable and fearful “shadow-sides” of himself that he may take for granted in his practice and who, through the process of questioning with other critical friends, opens up to new ideas and understandings of the nature of the problem.

Indeed, Self-Study Teacher Research grows directly out of teachers’ own reflections on their everyday classroom and problematic situations and is rooted in their own questions and questioning process. Samaras and Roberts (2003) argue that there is a conscious drive and deliberate action in this work of reflection:

We use the words *self* and *study*, **self-study**, as a component of reflection in which teachers systematically and critically examine their actions and the context of those actions as a way of developing a more consciously driven mode of professional activity. This is in contrast to action based on habit, tradition, or impulse. Self-study teachers inquire thoughtfully and deliberately into their teaching practice and the assumptions embedded in their practice
(p.13).

These questions in turn enable teachers to relate context-specific and case-based issues to larger theories of teaching and learning through documentation and analysis, bridging theory and practice (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001).

2.1.2 What is the Nature of the “Study” in *Self-Study*?

Clark and Erickson (2012) trace the development of practical inquiry in teaching from Aristotle to Dewey to Schwab and describe “Self-Study” as “the fifth commonplace”, in other words a defining feature of professional teaching practice in which teachers generate knowledge and research in an age of professionalisation that requires teachers to recognize “uncertainty and complexity” as underlying forces they must navigate (p.24-25). In their words, teachers conduct systematic and sustained inquiry, case-based and peer-reviewed reflection on practice, as well as reconstruction of goals and strategies that are consistent with the unique, complex and uncertain contexts in which they work.

This view of research is consistent with the view of self-study which is seen as a “deliberative practice” and “practitioner reflection” which is designed to explore and inform teacher knowledge and practice while making it public and broadly accessible (Schon, 1983, 1987; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Loughran, 2003). Lewison (2003) concisely describes the cycle of activity and research that I will be adopting for this self-study:

(Self-study is) a generally agreed upon set of insider research practices that promote teachers taking a close, critical look at their teaching and the academic and social development of their students...(it) involves classroom teachers in a cycle of inquiry, reflection and action. In this cycle, teachers question common practice, approach problems from new perspectives, consider research and evidence to propose new solutions, implement these solutions, and evaluate the results, starting the cycle anew (p.100).

In other words, this cycle of inquiry-reflection-action creates local knowledge (Stremmel, 2007; Davis, 2007) and it aims to bring about personal, social and educational change (Dewey, 1933, 1938; Meier & Henderson, 2007). The local knowledge that I seek to create concerns myself as a teacher animating academic conversations in second-cycle EESL classrooms at the Académie Ste-Thérèse; the aim of this local knowledge is to facilitate more inclusive and balanced participation in Socratic Circle Seminars through positive and enduring changes at personal, social and educational levels.

2.1.3 The Socratic Turn in Educational Theory and Practice

The idea of implementing Socratic Circles and Seminars in the high school classroom is rooted historically in various movements of educational reform in undergraduate institutions in the United States. For example, The “Great Books movement” saw higher education as a learning process that could be structured and enhanced by Socratic practice and questioning: started by Alexandre Meikeljohn at Amherst College between 1910-1940, continued by John Erskine at Columbia University, renewed by Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan at the University of Virginia and St. John’s College³; and promoted by Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins at the University of Chicago—these revolutionary programs continue to inspire a wide variety of initiatives at the high school and middle

³ St. John’s College (Annapolis, MD and Santa Fe, NM) is my own *alma mater* and I followed the Great Books Program at the undergraduate level, graduating in 1993 with a B.A. in the Liberal Arts. I am among the third-generation of family alumni who have attended this college. As a first generation alumnus, my grandfather later worked as Chair of the Board of Governors and later as a Historian of the college and its founders. As a second generation alumnus, my father has been serving as President of St. John’s College (Annapolis) for the past 26 years, actively advocating Liberal Arts learning in higher education.

school levels of education. For example, Adler's educational manifesto, "The Paideia Proposal" (1982), inspired organizations such as *The Center for Socratic Practice*, *The Touchstones Project*, *Junior Great Books*, *The National Paideia Center* among others.

Master teachers from these initiatives during the 1990s promulgated the values of Socratic seminars and Socratic practice in the high school curriculum in the United States through a series of professional articles and scientific research. For example, Gray (1989) outlined methods for creating community through student-centered seminars; Tredway (1995) discussed the value of Socratic Circles in promoting intellectual discourse and conflict resolution; Lambright (1995) explored how these seminars sparked imaginative interaction, creative collaboration and teambuilding skills; Strong (1996) as well as Elder and Paul (1998) established links between disciplined practice of Socratic Seminars and the growth of critical habits of thinking; and Metzger (1998) discovered they developed a lifelong love of reading in students.

In response to these publications, a growing number of pedagogical and didactic resources have been produced over the past fifteen years in order to popularize and model Socratic Circles or Socratic Seminars for teachers of English Language Arts at the high school and middle school levels of education (Seeskin, 1988; Yankelovich, 2001; Daniels, 2002; Moeller and Moeller, 2002; Copeland, 2005). The most recent among these is also the most complete and well balanced in terms of theory, methodology and practice: Matt Copeland's synthetic work (2005) makes a very solid case, for "fostering critical and creative thinking skills" that go beyond the ELA curriculum and which have interdisciplinary and life-long implications. An excellent introduction to the history of

Socratic Circle Dialogue and teaching methodologies (preparation, facilitation and follow-up), Copeland discusses Socratic Circles within the context of Reading Circles and Book Clubs and shows how they complement one another and lead to greater student choice and voice in the process (2005, pp.10-12).

Copeland's work is also supported by selected transcripts of real-class discussions with engaging and candid commentaries of how he balanced his voice with student voices, prompted students to take more ownership of discussions, handled common causes of disruption and managed the dynamics of inner circle conversation and outer-circle feedback. These factors are all relevant features of my own research issue.

2.1.4 Critical Theory of Democratic Discussions

There are many philosophers, intellectuals and theorists who have established strong connections between practices of humane and rational discussion and greater participation in a freer and more democratic world. One important current of Critical Theory, rooted in the seminal works of the German critical theorist Jurgen Habermas, establishes strong connections between the learning of discussion behaviours and the practices of democracy. His theory of communicative action (1984, 1987) and his discussion of the decline of the public sphere in our postindustrial world (1989) outlines the view that a society is more or less democratic depending on the processes of discussion that it uses to make decisions

about matters that affect people's lives.

Brookfield and Preskill's work, "Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms" (2005), grows directly out of this current in Critical Theory by discussing important theoretical foundations, teaching principles and practical strategies for enhancing democratic participation in the classroom. What are the best ways to elicit a variety of voices and views in a discussion? This key-question structures much of Brookfield and Preskill's work. They explain their vision for inclusive and balanced democratic discussion in the following words, "Democratic discussions work best when a large number of students participate, when they do so on many different occasions and with respect to many different issues, and when what they contribute adds depth and subtlety to the discussion" (2005, p.9).

I have witnessed this happen often in Socratic Circle Seminars that I have conducted, and I share this vision for discussion practices that "liberate" learners by ensuring inclusive participation, the expression of multiple viewpoints and the gradual articulation--coming from all these voices--of a larger perspective that was subtler and deeper than any particular individual view or voice. This vision does constitute something of my optimistic "horizon of expectation" concerning the benefits of democratically organized discussion.

2.1.5 Re-Calibrating my Practice through Reflection and Questioning

In recent years, my re-reading of Copeland (2005) and Brookfield and Preskill (2002) has prompted me to test out multiple tools and techniques that I had neglected to practice before then, all of which have been very effective in increasing student participation. Serious reflection on the efficacy of specific tools and techniques has allowed me to re-calibrate my practice in conducting Socratic Circle Seminars through a series of questions to myself. I will list a few questions here since they stem from my concern with eliciting more inclusive and balanced student participation. Ultimately, a review of these questions will help to clarify the context from which my specific research question springs.

Question 1: How do I ensure strong student participation before a seminar and is it enough?

I have written down reflections on the productive practice of integrating buzz-groups as a way of preparing students. As Copeland suggests, “working in small groups of three or four allows them to grow more comfortable and confident in sharing their opinions with peers and working together to make value judgements” (2005, p. 43). Like Copeland, I have argued that buzz groups are a useful and purposeful means of getting students to interpret texts, to persuade others argumentatively with supporting evidence and also to practice core academic conversation skills needed for more meaningful whole-class dialogue in Socratic Circle Seminars (Nelson, 2015a, 2015b). I suspect that this technique

is sufficient for preparing students but I intend to validate this through questionnaires or surveys given to students during the data collection of the present study.

Question 2: What techniques do I already use to foster a greater balance of voices in the inner-circle of a seminar and which ones need to be explored further?

I have been intrigued by Copeland's discussion of specific techniques for encouraging more meaningful conversation in the inner-circle (Chapter 4, 2005), by handling students who monopolize the discussion or distract attention with quick "verbal commands and cues" as well as "ante-systems"⁴. I have yet to test the ante-systems, but I know that the verbal commands such as the interjection to "focus" gives a helpful cue to the big talkers in the inner-circle. I have practiced this and have written down some "critical incidents" in a professional journal that demonstrate its effectiveness. I have also written down some ironic "fiascos" that occurred when I played the "nice guy" and neglected to intervene in the right way or at the right time. In addition, I have doodled images next to poetic fragments of my teaching self when I do "bark and round up the wandering sheep" or "tend the bonfire by piling dying embers and poking latent sparks". I write down these images so that I can capture and crystallize who I am when I am at my best in conducting seminars as a "guide on the side" rather than the "sage on the stage". Images of teacher-identity can do more than remind; they can also generate a powerful source of psychic

⁴ Ante-systems are select numbers of poker-chips or tokens, given to all students who must "ante-up" after every contribution they make; students wait for others to run out of tokens before they can make another comment.

energy for future guidance and performance (Palmer, 2007, p.155).

I wonder what these critical incidents, ironic narratives of fiascos, drawings and poetic fragments would reveal to me about my practice. It would be interesting to share these elements of my professional journal with colleagues who would become part of my team of “critical friends”. They might afford a kind of lens and offer analyses of aspects of my own practice to which I may be blind.

Question 3: How do I clarify my speech policy to students and does it encourage them to make meaningful contributions?

Copeland (2005) and Brookfield and Preskill (2002) both stress the importance of making explicit speech policies which outline the principles of entertaining multiple viewpoints and respecting reflective silence. I regularly repeat my speech policy in every inner-circle by reminding participants that the expression of multiple views is not only welcome and desirable but necessary to the fullness of shared inquiry and democratic dialogue. I even encourage students to play “the Devil’s advocate” and model how this done. I also insist on allowing a space for reflective silence; I literally place an empty chair in the middle of the inner-circle to physically embody and remind participants of that space, and I declare my credo that “silence is your friend, silence is not awkward nor dumb, silence is reflective and allows new voices to emerge and new views to arise”. It may be interesting to examine the effectiveness of this speech policy and see if it clearly supports the ideals behind my vision for democratic discussions. I intend to videotape

myself and take a closer look at how this policy is perceived and practiced.

Question 4: What pitfalls have I encountered in the inner-circle and what can I do to avoid or overcome them in the future?

While I have a persistent faith in the value of democratic habits of conversation, I do not fool myself with uncritical or unequivocal optimism about the benefits of discussion. It would be useful in my self-study to go back to some of the “common pitfalls” that I have related in my professional journal: for example, when my attempt to encourage the participation of more timid speakers “backfired and only served to marginalize them more in the face of the group”; or when “the inclusive practices I was seeking to foster only strengthened the position and behaviour of students playing the provocative role of outspoken chauvinists and bigots”; or when “overly intellectual” opening questions that I used with the “intention of broadening the scope of the discussion” actually discouraged student participation; or when the supposed “tolerance towards the expression of alternative viewpoints on serious social issues only served to repress or shut-down these views” and reinforce mainstream discourses.

While difficult to review, these examples are “instructive pitfalls” of student dissatisfaction, frustration or hostility that I have witnessed and narrated in brief vignettes with a view to reacting differently or with quicker reflexes next time. Within these narrative-vignettes, I would like to carry out a thought-experiment to test out intervention strategies. Basically, each thought-experiment would ask a hypothetical question like “What if... I had done this... or said this... or followed up like this?” The what-if question

would then be followed by a projected response. I intend to share these vignettes and thought-experiments with a team of critical friends in my self-study to test out their strength, probity and validity.

Again, Brookfield and Preskill offer suggestions about the interest of regularly collecting this kind of information about “critical incidents” from students instead of relying merely on one’s own “rethinking” of the situation. They discuss the weekly integration of anonymous critical incident questionnaires (CIQs) as students exit the classroom (pp.48-50) as well as the practice of using end-of-term class-evaluation forms with pointed questions about the overall experience of discussion participation (pp.283-284). These are specific tools that I would like to add to my teaching practice because they would enrich the types of feedback garnered in outer-circle conversations. Serious personal reflection on the results of CIQs and evaluation-forms could help me to become more critically aware of the complexity of the wider social forces at work when conducting discussions and help me to keep some of these forces in check so that other voices and views can be heard.

Question 5: What do I already do to ensure more inclusive feedback from the outer circle and what can be done in the future to ensure greater balance in the presentation of student views?

Again, re-reading Chapter 5 of Copeland’s work has made me realize the importance of giving more time to the feedback session from all members of the outer-circle, allowing a full 10-15 minutes to hear from everyone instead of 2-5 minutes to hear from a few

volunteers. I also realized the effectiveness of systematically using the feedback-form he proposes, asking students to record specific observations using the rating system and questions. I also have asked students to keep these forms together in a learning portfolio over the course of a year to keep traces of problems, goals and progress. The value of this kind of critical feedback was validated by comments from invited colleagues and teacher-guests in previous years who took time to observe seminars and from about 6 hours of videotaped seminar discussions which include outer-circle comments.

Copeland's comments on meaningful feedback prompt me to examine how I can increase the quality of the feedback given and increase the accountability of all participants in the outer circle, making them feel more responsible for their participation. For example, I know that I could handle students who tend to over-praise, over-criticize or hide behind generalities by asking for specific indicators to measure progress, by personally commenting on behavioural patterns that I think could be controlled with more responsible engagement, by placing requirements on comments received (i.e., no repeated remarks, etc.), or by assigning specific roles to chronically distracted students (conversation mapper, scorekeeper, etc.). These are all suggested by Copeland in the chapter concerning outer-circle feedback (2005, p.87-91).

2.2 Specific Research Question and Objective

In the end, I have outlined the conceptual framework of my questioning within the paradigm of Self-Study research and shown how my own "intimate scholarship" and "reflective inquiry" intersects with two major currents in educational theory, namely the

Socratic Turn and Critical Theory of Democratic Discussions. The problem of unbalanced and uneven participation in Socratic Circles has been largely described, explained and explored from the perspective of a teacher coming to terms with his own vision, wondering how his own values translate into practice, framing typical problems as disjunctions or discrepancies between practice and belief, in other words, from the vantage point of a current of Self-Study Research known as "living educational theory".

Living educational theory, as the name suggests, is not based simply on propositional theories but on lived experience; as such, it is a reconceptualization of teaching practice with strong and direct practical implications (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2003; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). Self-study scholars who examine practical problems from this point of perspective are most often interested in examining the "authenticity and alignment" of their own beliefs with their own practice (Samaras, 2011, p.98). With a view to circumscribing the scope of this essay even more clearly, I will investigate the overall alignment of my teaching practice with my belief in democratic and Socratic conversation.

The following specific research question will constitute the focus of my Self-Study:

How can I more effectively align my teaching practice with my belief in active, inclusive and balanced participation in Socratic Circle Seminars?

As stated, this question can in turn be inflected in terms of past and future practice:

- In the past, what types of obstacles have I faced in the alignment of my teaching

practice with this belief?

- Of these types of obstacles, which can be avoided or overcome through deliberate reflective teaching?

2.3 Hypothesis

In terms of my teaching identity I predict that this self-study will reveal a need to be less permissive and more assertive, strategic and vigilant while conducting Socratic Circle Seminars. This attitude may describe a kind of strong ethical stance, rooted in my vision for a student-centered and democratic classroom, and expressed in a variety of ways to create a safer and more inviting space for all speakers to come forward.

I predict that several obstacles to inclusive and balanced participation can be overcome since they are within my control. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- clarifying expectations through explicit policies about what balanced participation means and why it is important elicit multiple perspectives;
- intervening more to regulate the behaviour and attitudes of speakers who distract, monopolize, exclude or squelch conversation for minor voices;
- responding appropriately to students who clearly talked too much as well as to those who “checked-out” from the beginning;
- asking for more pointed and varied feedback (outer-circle comments, critical

- incident questionnaires, reports) and ensuring follow-up;
- rewarding student participation so that students feel that it “counts” even when participation may not be graded.

2.4 Concluding Statement

I started this chapter by situating the conceptual framework for this project of Self-Study within the research paradigm of qualitative research and practitioner inquiry in education to outline the educational paradigm to which this work is indebted, the undercurrents of which inform the processes of Self-Study Teacher Research. I then related this paradigm to two well-established currents in education and educational theory and research and called these the *Socratic Turn* in secondary and higher education and the *Critical Theory of Democratic Discussion* to map out something of the field to which my work belongs and to which it will make its own contribution. It should be clear by now to the reader that this highly personal inquiry is sufficiently supported and informed by larger paradigms, concepts and currents in educational research. I then constructed this framework or theory of “what is going on” in my teaching practice (Maxwell, 2005) in a brief sequence of “modules” that showed how these two currents of existing theory related directly to my own experiential knowledge, pilot exploratory research and thought experiments. This reflection, recalibration and questioning of my teaching practice set the groundwork for the formulation of my specific research question and hypothesis about avoidable obstacles to balanced and inclusive participation and the expression of multiple

views in SCSs. It is my hope that this research be both manageable in scope and ambition while being instructive and fruitful to me and the educational community in which I work as a reflective practitioner.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

“There is no one way, or correct way, of doing self-study. Rather, how a self-study might be ‘done’ depends on what is sought to be better understood” (Loughran, 2004, p.15)

3.0 Introduction

What methodology, models and methods would be most appropriate to the objectives of this research project? With a view to clarifying a response to this question, I will specify in the first two sections of this chapter the type of master’s essay design to which this Self-Study Teacher Research corresponds. In addition, I will outline the methodology I chose to implement, justifying how it corresponds to the specific and general research objectives for this type of essay. In the third section, I will describe the learner-characteristics of my students as well as briefly review my relationship to the members of the “critical friends team” with whom I collaborated. In the fourth section, I will outline the data collection techniques used before, during and after the research process and briefly review the type of data analysis I employed. In the fifth section, I will address a few ethical considerations that bear upon consent and the protection of the privacy of all the participants in my research project. Before concluding, I will outline a calendar-chart of basic goals, describing the process and the anticipated duration for each step of the

research project that was carried out.

3.1 Essay-Type

In a very helpful and inspirational article addressed to graduate students at the Université de Sherbrooke, Pierre Paillé outlined a series of 12 methodological designs or “research scenarios” that could be used in the context of qualitative research aimed at professionalization in the field of education and pedagogy (2007, 134). The seventh research scenario describes the basic principles behind my Self-Study Teacher Research and is appropriately entitled “Reflexive Analysis of One’s Professional Practice” (my translation, p.143). Paillé qualifies reflexive analysis as a “systematic and critical analysis of a portion of one’s professional experience taken both as an object of study and as catalyst for a self-analysis that may have repercussions on the intimate life of the teacher” (ibid). The research design follows six sequential steps in terms of the production process:

- 1) Choosing the portion of practice to analyze;
- 2) Choosing the corpus of materials to analyze in a reflexive manner;
- 3) Constituting the corpus of materials;
- 4) Thematically analyzing the corpus of materials;
- 5) Reflecting on salient pedagogical, didactic and professional elements of given themes analyzed;

6) Outlining, on the basis of this reflexive analysis, general implications and potential modifications to be made to teaching practice.

Paillé's design for reflexive analysis describes the production process of the research to be conducted in sequential form, a process to which I will return in section 3.6 of this chapter (Calendar of Research Work).

3.2 Proposed Methodology and Justification

The methodology of basic principles, procedures and guidelines underlying Self-Study Teacher Research needs to be explicitly outlined and justified within the context of my specific research question. Drawing from rich literature within the culture of the self-study movement, a Five Foci framework was designed, gleaned, refined and extended from over two decades of work by self-study scholars (Samaras, 2011, 70). This Five Foci Framework illustrated in the circular graphic representation on the next page indicates the basic components of the self-study research process. While it may look sequential in presentation, the framework is meant to be interpreted as recursive and hermeneutic in nature rather than as a merely lockstep process.

FIVE-FOCI FRAMEWORK



I applied this Five Foci framework to my own self-study project because it corresponds to the general and specific objectives of my research problem. First, my research project began with my own personal inquiry, situated in the context of the second-cycle EESL classroom at the Académie Ste-Thérèse. This “personal situated inquiry” was undertaken

to address the recurrent problem or dilemma of how to reach a better balance of voices and views in Socratic Circle Seminars. More specifically, it addressed the alignment of my belief in active, inclusive and balanced participation with my actual teaching practice, with a view to identifying the recurrent obstacles I had faced in the past as well as those that could be avoided or overcome through deliberative and reflective practice. Since this research project generated knowledge based on my own personal inquiry, instead of responding to outside researchers, it has immediate utility to the context of my professional practice and towards efforts in educational reform at my school (Cochrane-Smith and Lytle, 1993).

Second, as a self-study teacher I have been working in an intellectually safe and supportive community of practitioners have helped me to improve my practice through “Critical Collaborative Inquiry”. This means that my own personal insights on the research issue were documented, shared and critiqued to validate my own interpretations with the help of a team of critical friends. Additionally, this means that the critical friend team was solicited to ask provocative questions, provide data to be examined through another lens, participate in open, honest and constructive feedback and advocate for the success of my ongoing work (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). This involved some measure of risk-taking and a level of vulnerability; being receptive to other perspectives, listening to reports about my own automatic behaviours or questions about hidden assumptions behind my practice. This effort in “collective professionalism” (MELS, 2001) demonstrates the paradoxical nature of self-study research that, while focused on myself as a practitioner, is actually quite open, interactive and collaborative.

Third, this research project was aimed at improving conditions for learning on personal, classroom and professional levels. The goal of learning to align my own practice with my core values and beliefs in democratic discussion has helped me to grow personally and also positively influence students' learning in my classroom. This improvement-aimed purpose has animated the self-study teacher research project throughout (LaBoskey, 2004). On the professional level, the blending of personal and professional knowledge with personal theory has generated a greater sense of purpose, confidence and encouragement to share my practice with others practitioners in my field and this encourages me to make a meaningful contribution to teacher education (Beck, Freese, Kosnik & Samaras, 2006).

Fourth, self-study goes beyond mere introspection or complacent autobiography by following a transparent and systemic research process. Wolcott (2001), for example, recommends that self-study teachers do more than convince readers on the basis of a fieldwork approach; rather, in order to be "transparent", they should give readers sufficient detail about how data was obtained and discuss how it was analyzed. I have followed this advice in order to help other researchers who may have comparable field notes, experiences and data sets. Additionally, I committed to being "systematic" in my approach by building a plan, scheduling ways I could share my work with critical friends, kept an "audit" trail of my data collection sources, shared my analysis with evidence of my claims so that my research could contribute to a broader knowledge base (Grossman, 2005).

Finally, self-study teacher research "generates knowledge that is made public through presentation and publication" (Samaras, 2011, 81). This commitment to publicizing

personal reflective inquiry is fundamental since the audience is crucial for shaping and refining one's own work and in making it useful to other practitioners of the teaching and research community (LaBoskey, 2004; Loughran & Northfield, 1999). I intend to make my research project available on the Moodle-based web-site of the Université de Sherbrooke and share my findings in workshops or conference-presentations with EESL practitioners within the federation of private schools in Québec (FEPP) as well as ESL and English teacher-organizations in Québec (SPEAQ, ATEQ).

3.3 Academic Milieu Studied and Learning/Teaching Task

I worked with three classes of secondary 5 students, aged 16-17 (95 total), all enrolled in the EESL program at the Académie Ste-Thérèse (Campus Jacques-About). As explained earlier in the presentation of the context (section 1.2), the great majority of these students consistently demonstrated a high level of fluency and strong participation for discussions of conversational English, adapted to EESL classes. Some students were also quite gifted and talented discussion leaders and moderators in SCSs! While uneven participation and unbalanced expression of viewpoints is experienced by me as an ongoing and complex dilemma, it should be said that students gradually acquire knowledge and understanding of how SCSs work over the course of the year and gain competency and confidence in developing academic conversation skills. They had been initiated to this discussion-format in their secondary 3 English enrichment classes with me in 2014-2015 on at least two occasions. Following this, they participated in at least seven SCSs this year

in their secondary 5 EESL classes in 2016-2017.

Most SCSs this year addressed interpretive literature in an introductory and/or final wrap-up discussion (Satirical poetry, Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, or Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*) as well as issues in current events and popular culture (Digital Detox, Edward Snowden and Mass Surveillance, Debunking Fake News). For this self-study, I observed the final SCS in secondary 5 as we tried to come to terms with the satirical and dystopian young-adult novel, M.T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002). Students had already worked on the four parts of the novel in small reading circles, using a novel document, so many aspects of basic comprehension had been covered and clarified. I asked a larger opening question about the subversive influence of this book, the way it might or may not support a movement of teen-resistance to overconsumption and teen-marketing, corporate empire, social media and digital connection. Students were introduced to this question at least one week before participating in the SCS so that they could come fully prepared to participate.

I anticipated a few challenges depending on which class I would be addressing. For example, in class 502-506 (28 students), I had already faced cultural challenges due to the multicultural make-up and clan-culture of the group: over half the class are second or third generation immigrants from Greece, Russia, Haiti, Italy, Lebanon and Belgium. For instance, I had to carefully monitor, separate and coach four very extroverted boys who identified themselves openly as "Italian stallions" and who tended to dominate discussions even when they had little meaningful content to contribute. On the other side of the spectrum, three second-generation Haitian and Senegalese girls tended to stick together with whispered comments instead of opening out to the whole class.

In class 503-504 (33 students) gender differences came to the fore and I needed to carefully constitute grouping-plans in the inner and outer circles and sometimes intervene to change a dominant course of discussion. This was not due to unequal numbers (16 guys and 17 girls) but rather to the way the guys and the girls would tend to support members of their own sex and exclude members of the opposite sex. In fact, I had noticed over the course of the year, an ongoing and undeclared “battle of the sexes” taking shape in SCSs. For example, in response to a group of six very dynamic and opinionated boys who called themselves “The Packers”, a group of six highly intelligent and introverted girls had taken shape and joined forces in SCSs.

Class 501-505 (34 students) was my dream-class—where academically talented, analytically minded and emotionally mature students consistently piloted the discussion by supporting inclusive, creative and deep critical thinking. I neither observed gender wars nor cultural clans to monitor. The major obstacle to more balanced conversation concerned four timid-speakers who occasionally needed to be prompted to speak up; lack of confidence in oral interaction would prevent them from fully participating.

3.4 Critical Friend Team

For the purpose of collaborative inquiry, I constituted a critical friend team of six professional teachers: two teacher-mentors, two pedagogical counsellors and two teacher-colleagues. Both mentors were retired EESL teachers from private high schools in the lower Laurentians who have seen SCSs that I have conducted in the past. Both had

attended a conference that I gave on SCSs at the FEEP (Nelson, 2010); this inspired one to implement SCSs in his high-school English classes and we had had ongoing talks about this practice for over five years. As for the pedagogical counsellors, one helped me to implement high-tech projects and resources; the other coached me in the English Department for over 16 years and has personally witnessed the development of my teaching practice with SCSs. My trusted colleagues both work in the English department: with one I had been sharing my work on SCSs on a regular but informal basis over the past three years; with the other, SCSs are entirely new.

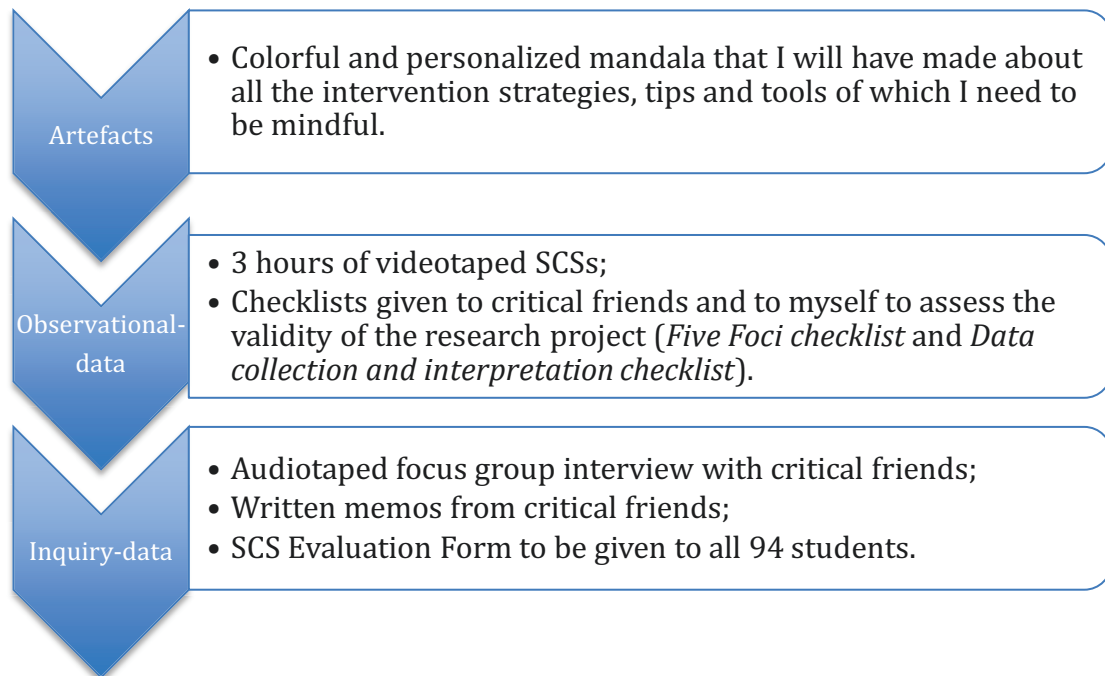
All members of the Critical Friend Team were asked to read chapters 1-3 of my master's essay before coming to one of my secondary 5 EESL classes and observing at least one SCS. After, depending on their availability, they were asked to follow-up, individually or in teams, with written memos or recorded conversations of observations that pertained to my specific objectives of research. Finally, I asked them for feedback about my research analysis (chapters 4-5) to validate my interpretations or to question them if necessary.

3.5 Methods for Collecting & Analyzing Data

Rather than simply asking myself what data I should collect, I conscientiously tried to ask myself what types of data would best help me to answer my research question. At the same time, I tried to multiply the types of data to be collected, to vary the sources I gathered it from and to register it on different supports (audio-visual, written, painted) so

that emerging themes and categories might cross-over and connect to various aspects of the specific research question.

So what data gathering techniques are most appropriate to the focus of this Self-Study Teacher Research? Hendricks (2006) presents three categories or kinds of data-collection techniques: 1) examination of artefacts, including student and teacher-generated work; 2) observational data, such as research logs, videotapes, and checklists; and 3) inquiry data, such as individual interviews, focus-group interviews, surveys and questionnaires. I used data collection techniques from all three categories as this descriptive tableau shows.



To ensure transparency, I provided the generic letter of consent, interview questions, the

SCS evaluation form, as well as the research assessment checklists in Appendixes A, B, C & D of this research project.

A close reading of the interview questions and evaluation form show a very close correspondence to my specific research question concerning avoidable obstacles to balanced participation and expression. For example, I asked my Critical Friend team if they “saw” the problem, how it manifested itself, and whether they saw this as something that could be solved, prevented or attenuated. Mover, I asked my students if they felt the teacher tried to get all students to participate and practice democratic habits of discussion and whether they felt these aspects of practice were practiced consistently, occasionally, or only rarely.

A close reading of the assessment checklists demonstrates my commitment to assessing the validity, trustworthiness and generalizability of the data analysis and interpretation as well as the use of the Five Foci methodological framework. Very specific questions were asked about my level of engagement with the different aspects of the methodology proposed as well as the specific alignment of data-collection and data-analysis with the research question and purpose. Critical friend perspectives, such as the one afforded by these checklists, were invaluable data sources that allowed me as a researcher to dialogue about my research work to gain multiple perspectives. They were intended to ensure the dialogical validity of the research work as well as to provide a kind of “prism effect” that would allow me to alter my own perspective about my own practice (Samaras, 2011, 214).

How were these different forms of data be treated and analyzed? Basically, I read my data closely as I collected it, writing down notes as I made observations, and coding the

data as I gathered it (i.e. color-coded categories about central or adjacent issues, avoidable or unavoidable obstacles, etc.). In other words, I inductively employed what is called by qualitative researchers like Creswell, a “constant comparative method” which entails “taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories” (2007, 64). For example, inquiry-data such as the audio-recorded interview and written memos from my Critical Friend Team were transcribed, reread and examined. Then I began to code emerging themes and transfer these into lists. Quantifiable findings from the Socratic Circle Evaluation form were “matrixed” and then visually represented in charts or tables (i.e. how many said “occasionally, somewhat or rarely” to question 5?); other qualitative remarks were highlighted, coded and categorized. These sources of data were later be put into relationship with other sources, comparing and contrasting findings and interpretations.

For observational-data such as the 3 hours of videotaped classroom talk, I used the following sequential production-process with a variety of technological platforms or applications: 1) I uploaded all of the i-Pad film-files to *OneDrive* and shared this dossier with critical friends; 2) I discussed with them some emerging categories or themes and the best examples to illustrate these via *Skype*; 3) I then began a short montage of salient moments (15 min. video out of 3 hours) using *i-Movie*; 4) I next took notes about my reactions for a thematic presentation of evidence; 5) I finally transferred my movie-file into the application called *Screencast-o-matic* and produced a screencast audio-visual commentary of my reactions to filmed sequences of SCSs.

For the mandala-artefact, I went back to my professional journal and the narration of

critical incidents, reread and coded the strategies and techniques I often employed to ensure balanced participation. Next, I began to visualize these techniques in sketchnotes that visually coded the information in symbolic and figurative ways. Finally, I transferred these to a personalized and circular mandala (from pencil sketch to colored pencil or paint).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In order to respect the right to privacy and legal codes regulating the integrity and dignity of the person, I adopted the recommended code of ethics for minors (Gaudreau, 2011, pp.111-121). For example, before videotaping sequences of SCS in class, I ensured full permission of students and parents/legal guardians in the participation of videotaped class-sessions. A formal letter of consent written in French (Appendix A), describing the process of videotaping and the projected use of videotaped sequences as well as the use of SCS evaluation forms, was sent out via email and paper-copy to all parents and guardians of my students in secondary V EESL (classes 502-506, 503-504, 501-505). Once I received permission and consent, I made the necessary adjustments (selecting groups, visibility of student faces, non-participant observers) in order to conduct my classes in response to these ethical codes of research. For participants of all three groups, anonymity of results were guaranteed, and videotaped sequences of discussion were used for purpose of research and reflection only. When soliciting students to fill out the SCS evaluation forms, I sought permission to use any written comments received; however, I respected any desire for privacy on this account and refer to students by pseudonyms. For the

members of the Critical Friend Team, a consent form was sent out explaining the role of a critical friend in the collaborative process of inquiry and how I would be using fictional names to protect their professional identity when naming them specifically within this research project.

3.7 Calendar of Research Work

Principle steps	Methods employed	Targeted date	Duration
Author research question and objectives, conceptual framework and research methodology (Chapters 1, 2 & 3)	Align practice with self-study method, plan purposeful pedagogies, observe classroom, frame question within literature, write!	March 1, 2017	5-6 weeks, into mid-April 2017
Plan to collect and to organize data and protect individuals through ethical practice	Establish critical friend team and set up meetings, explore best ways to videotape and audio-record, create and distribute letters of consent for minors, create SCS evaluation form	April 17	2 weeks, end of April 2017

Collect data from varied and multiple sources on multiple supports	Invite critical friends to observe classes, videotape seminars, solicit audio-recorded feedback or written memos, distribute and collect evaluation forms	June 1, 5, 7, 9	first two weeks of June
Analyze data thematically	Transcribe audio-feedback into coded categories or themes, compile evaluation form results in graphic representations, compile SCS excerpts into a short thematic screencast video, inductively employ constant comparative method and grounded theory	July 2017	July to August 2017
Reflect on pedagogical, didactic and professional implications	Assess the quality of research data and analysis (transparency, validation, trustworthiness, reliability, and generalizability) through checklists to critical friends	September	Fours weeks of September 2017
Outline general implications and future modifications to practice	Write final chapters of essay, deposit master's essay, publish professional articles or research articles and or present results at workshops or conferences!	September	September 2017 to May 2018

The targeted dates and duration of the final three steps turned out to be too ambitious and took a lot longer to complete than initially planned. For example, the filmed screencast commentary, for merely technical reasons, was completed between October 2017 and March 2018. Also, the targeted dates for the reflection work with critical friends was postponed until April 2018; they needed to see more of the written essay before making general assessments. Finally, the process of publishing and sharing this research

beyond the University will be ongoing over the course of the next year (June 2018-May 2019).

3.8 Concluding Statement

In the end, the production calendar of this master's essay closely followed the design scenario of a "reflexive analysis of practice" (Paillé, 2007) since it moved between my personal practice of conducting Socratic Circle Seminars to wider pedagogical reflection on the ways of achieving greater balance in student voices and views in democratic discussions. I have shown how this design was closely in tune with the recursive principles and methodological guidelines of the five foci framework of Self-Study Teacher Research, since the inquiry was at once personally situated, aimed at improved learning and systemic (Samaras, 2011). Moreover, it involved close collaboration with a team of critical friends during all the phases of the research work, including close reading, classroom observation, critical commentary and research-assessment. Last, I took care to follow a code of ethics to protect the privacy of all participants (Gaudreau, 2011), while collecting and thematically analyzing materials from multiple sources, including artefacts, observational data and inquiry data (Hendricks, 2006). The reader will see that the substantial variety of sources and supports of data collected and analyzed, from the mandala to the screencast video to the compilation of SCS evaluation forms, certainly does shed light on different facets of the specific research question, helping me to see more clearly those "avoidable obstacles" to achieving more balanced academic conversation in Socratic Circle Seminars.

CHAPTER 4: THEMATIC & CATEGORICAL ANALYSIS OF DATA

In the following chapter, I will make a thematic and categorical presentation of the different forms of collected data as presented in Chapter 3 (section 4). These will be divided into a variety of separate sections, moving sequentially from personal artefacts, to observational data and finally to inquiry data. By thematic, I mean to highlight the points of convergence within each type of data; by categorical, I mean to identify emerging issues that speak directly to the specific research question about aligning my teaching practice with my belief in democratic conversations. This presentation will be necessarily summary in nature. For example, out of three hours of videotaped seminars, I will transcribe a few critical moments, excerpts of exchanges that stand out to me as worthy of deeper reflection and review in terms of converging themes and emerging categories. I will also detail some of the procedures I employed for compiling results, using codes, finding patterns, making notes of repeated behaviours and creating visual displays. In each section, I will walk the reader through the steps I undertook to sort through, organize and interpret each type of data and relate the role played by critical friends who acted as an audience of public critique and validation.

4.1 Personal Artefacts: Mandala of Balanced Mindfulness

While taking the class for the writing of the research proposal (PED851), I began to see the extraordinary potential of arts-based data sources for rethinking teacher professional

images, making a descriptive analysis of a situation and exploring a kind of knowledge secured through sight or "epistemic seeing" (Eisner 1991, as quoted by Samaras, 2011, p.187). This mandala was created with this larger triple objective. In addition to creating a visual diagram of tips, tools and strategies of which I need to be mindful to conduct SCSs with more inclusive participation and balanced expression, I also began to rethink my role as a teacher, to describe conditions of an ideal classroom situation and to capture intimate knowledge in a visual way.

4.1.1 Collecting Materials for the Mandala

The final copy of the *Mandala of Balanced Mindfulness*, while created in one day, is the fruit of long reflection, rereading of research, and preliminary notes and sketches. I looked back to my notes, doodles and reminders to myself in my professional journal for some guidance. I found many notes about generating the right state of mind in myself or students, sometimes formulated as questions about generating enough attention at the end of the day to explore multiple sides of a text. I also found notes about the kind of vital focus that is needed to get everyone to listen deeply, respond if prompted and set the right tone for discussion. Some of these were accompanied by images of meditation figures in sitting positions, symbolic yin-yang images, and sketches of intersecting spheres. I decided that these images would be useful as reminders of problematic situations and powerful as symbols of balanced duality. The sitting figures were reworked into an image of concentric and amplified profiles. The spheres later worked their way into the central

ring as well as the decorative circumference of the mandala.

While re-reading my research proposal, I deliberately flagged several paragraphs for iconic coding on colorful post-it notes. For example, in my discussing of adjacent issues (p.14-15), I drew the image of a clock to represent "fair timekeeping", a question-mark to represent active reading strategies, a bumblebee to represent buzz-groups, an FF on a worksheet to represent feedback-forms and critical incident questionnaires. The apple with tokens and the ten pointed star are representations of techniques like ante-systems and conversation maps discussed to encourage more active participation; both were mentioned in Chapter 2 (p.29 & p.32). I represented the seal of my *Alma mater*, St. John's College, next to my discussion of the Great Books movement (p.25) with the logo of seven open books representing the Liberal Arts, all placed around the image of a balance and the Latin slogan: *Facio liberos ex liberis libre libraque* (a playful pun on Latin roots that can be translated roughly as "I make free-thinking adults from children by means of books and a balance"). Later, elements of the seal and these personal icons from my conscious mind were incorporated in the outer rings of the mandala.

Finally, I decided to try out the exercise proposed by Parker J. Palmer (2007, pp. 152-154) concerning the reframing of critical moments through metaphorical images. He asks teaching faculty to explore the mystery of their teaching selfhood by completing the phrase: "When I am teaching at my best, I am like a ..." This must be done quickly, resisting the temptation to censor or edit the image that arises within, as it were rising from the unconscious mind. The image can then be explored for the strength of personal identity and integrity it reveals as well as the "shadow side" it may suggest in us. For

myself, the double image of the dragon and the phoenix surfaced powerfully as I thought deeply about my best experiences in conducting SCSs; those times when the dialogue was secured by swift and discrete intervention, dynamic movement of questioning, and subtle judgement. While not specifically "Socratic", dragon-phoenix images are familiar to me from my travel experiences in China, my interest in traditional Chinese art and calligraphy, my explorations of Taoist concepts in personal poetry as well as my daily practice of Tai-Ji. It seemed natural to transfer and to draw these images at the heart of the mandala as part of my inner-landscape when I am actively engaged in SCSs.



Photo of *The Mandala of Balanced Mindfulness* (Tollof Nelson, February 2018)

4.1.2 Thematic Presentation of the Mandala

"Les mandalas sont des artéfacts analogiques...une sorte d'outil philosophique qui nous permet de travailler par analogie. L'analogie est une méthode de recherche-action qui consiste à transposer intuitivement un thème d'un domaine mieux connu vers un domaine moins bien maîtrisé." (J-F Malherbe, 2006, pp.46-47)

The white, pale blue and darker blue shades of the mandala open out onto a space of peaceful and cool reflection. When I gaze at the mandala, I observe multiple planes and frames of reference: five successive and concentric rings can be traced from the center to the periphery. These rings compose an ideal picture of harmonic balance and unity in multiplicity. They radiate from the center out towards an inclusive circular classroom space; at the same time, they move back from the circumference in towards the central landscape of the teacher's soul. The symmetrical repetition and doubling of 36 colourful concentric spheres along the circumference represents multiple circles of dialogue: students holding hands in the spirit of friendship as well as their belonging to the dialogic space of their own interiority.

At the heart of the mandala is the mytho-poetic image of the dragon and phoenix, an image of imperial power, elemental force and magical transformation. The balanced duality of the portrayal is reinforced by the dark and the light spheres near the mouth of the dragon and the beak of the phoenix, representing the power of the spoken word and the power of silent observation. The dragon is master of all elements and knows how to move invisibly between fire, water, earth and air. This clearly represents my intention to incarnate all elemental attributes when conducting the conversation without taking too much space, since the dragon knows when to strike flame into the inner-circle, when to

elevate, to lighten or to remain aloof from the discussion, when to help the conversation flow or cool down, and when to bring things humbly back "down to earth". The phoenix complements and helps to balance the force of the dragon by regenerating itself through the power of transformation; a symbolic image of the seminar itself as it moves and develops between the inner-outer circles, the phoenix is born, grows, opens wings, bursts into free-flowing flame, dies and is re-born out of its embers continuously. The phoenix recalls my role as the pedagogue who tends the fire, finds kindling material, sparks the discussion with questions and slow-burning inquiry, knowing how to poke or when to fan the embers back into flame when the conversation begins to wane.

The dynamic images of the phoenix and dragon are circumscribed by the fixed symmetry of four white meditating figures, equally poised at the four central axes. Back straight, legs crossed, arms open and palms outward, they demonstrate my sense of preparation before a seminar begins, my openness to hosting the conversation and welcoming all students inside, my poise and equanimity of mind, and my sense of detachment when I give students more ownership over the course of the conversation. The white color of these figures also connects to the white background against which we can see the symbols of my Liberal Arts training and background at St. John's College (books and balance) as well as to the Latin credo of working towards the creation of greater freedom of mind through the careful examination of seminal books of knowledge and wisdom.

4.1.3 Categorical Implications & Questions Raised

"Un mandala est un outil de recherche car il permet d'approfondir notre réponse à la question 'Que puis-je savoir?' Il nous ouvre, en effet, à partir de ses configurations visibles, un accès décisif à l'invisible." (J-F Malherbe, 2006, p.48)

In order to get closer to the specific research question of the Self-Study Teacher Research Project about "effectively aligning my teaching practice with my belief", I think it will be necessary to reflect on the nature of the dark and pale blue figures behind the white meditating figures. These colorful figures have the same posture and profile as the white figures, with the exception of the hands which are pointed towards the ground below the images of the open books. They seem to anchor the discussion in a close reading that touches the texts. Their size and amplitude suggest that they are "higher" images of my teaching self: stronger, bolder and more noble. However, they are not entirely centered around the white figures and their size may also indicate the power of my "shadows". This puzzles me. Do they fan outwards to the left and right of the white figure and actually center and empower it, giving it special council? Or do they illustrate a conflict, de-centering or over-shadowing of my liberal-minded intentions?

Whatever the answer, clearly the higher shadow figures are connected and consolidated by the unity of the third ring. Inside the ring, I see symbolic images of pedagogical tips, tools and response strategies that help to give structure to SCSs and to help to manage dynamics of inclusive participation and feedback: opening questions, feedback forms, conversation maps, ante or token systems, fair time-keeping, buzz groups as well as

furniture and environmental set-up (lamp).

It seems possible to admit that this mandala reveals a complex duality at the heart of my teaching self, between the "tool-minded" pedagogue who wants to insure inclusive participation and help to "manage" the balanced expression of views in a democratic classroom and the "mytho-poetic" master-teacher who is more sensitive to the elemental forces and liberating power of a good academic conversation itself, regardless of inclusive participation and balanced expression. This duality in the mandala seems to beg the following question: Under what conditions can the tool-minded pedagogue co-exist with, and even consolidate, the mytho-poetic identity of my teaching self like the successive rings of the mandala?

The answer seems to reside in the larger pale-blue figures since they offer the larger perspective of the mandala and seem to hold several keys. How is this so? First, their pale-blue color harmonizes the darker blue and the white-coloured figures and their position "re-aligns" itself with the central axis of the white figures in the third ring. Second, the pale blue color of these figures also resonates with the colors of the open books and the body of the phoenix in the first and second rings. Finally, the pale-blue heads of these sitting figures also pierce the circumference and are "crowned" with triangles that point outside the frame of the mandala.

These pale-blue figures suggest that it is possible to re-align my teaching practice with my beliefs when I rise above mere pedagogy and "get out of my own way" (shadow and dragon) and instead use the tools and techniques in the service of the conversation

(phoenix and outer rings). This does not imply total detachment but rather intervention used with discernment: the dragon becomes less visible/audible and the tools and techniques are selected more carefully according to the nature of the conversation and the class dynamic. The results of other types of data will help to nuance this discovery about "getting out of my own way".

4.1.4 Validating my Personal Interpretation with Critical Friends

After creating my mandala and then engaging in a critical reading of its symbolic meaning over my winter break (February 10-17, 2018), I submitted electronic copies of both to four of my critical friends. Three answered promptly by email and I include their remarks here, using pseudonyms. Anne, critical friend and pedagogical counsellor, wrote: "I don't exactly know if the Mandala should be included here (among the data sources) but I just want to add that I was very impressed with it". Two others expressed their approval of the critical analysis and creative problem-solving involved. Karen, critical friend and colleague, wrote, "the mandala image is a very artistic and powerful expression of your teaching of SCSs and I think your analysis is very rich". Arielle, critical friend and colleague, wrote, "I think your analysis is both deep and compelling. It shows how you can work out your own understanding of the issues you face and find your path. In this sense, the mandala can also be used to creatively deal with the situation of uneven participation and expression. Kudos to you!".

4.2 Observational Data: Filmed SCSs

Over the past ten years of my teaching practice, I have periodically videotaped my SCSs. Sometimes this was undertaken with a view to promoting SCSs and academic conversation in the classroom with trusted colleagues, conference boards and researchers in the field of education. At other times, I filmed SCSs with a view to gaining a more objective perspective of myself and my students in the classroom. This has helped me in the past to make interesting observations and adjustments to aspects of my practice that I had taken for granted or simply neglected to see. It is my hope that this filmed practice of SCSs will grant me the same point of perspective

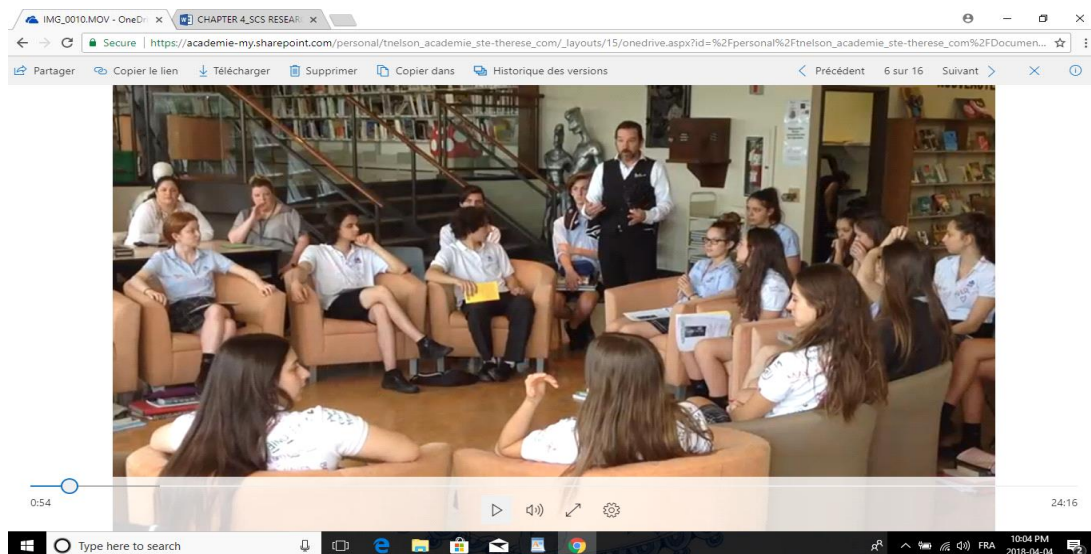


Photo-still of class 503-504 in the library with me making introductory remarks and giving the opening question.

4.2.1 Conditions for Collecting, Coding & Commenting on SCSs

I asked M. Jean-Pierre Dufresne, the techno-pedagogical counsellor at our school, to help me to set-up and to film the three SCSs to which my Critical Friends Team had been invited. I had already secured permission for this step of the procedure from students and parents through the consent form sent home (Annex 3). He set up three tripods with iPads at three different corners of the classroom or library; this way interactions could be filmed, and sounded recorded, from different angles. Each SCS was filmed as a set of four 10-12-minute recordings, corresponding to a conversation in the inner-circle or outer circle. Unfortunately, we had trouble getting optimal sound-quality during the entire session of the first and second seminars, so we decided to change our film-production strategy for the third seminar with better microphones. Out of this third SCS, he later created two compilations of the film and audio tracks (25 min. each) by using iMovie. He then uploaded these to a school account on OneDrive and shared them with me.

I carefully reviewed these two films and created the following thematic observation-chart so that I could objectify evidence of specific teaching strategies or student-led initiatives that had an incidence on the overall course of the conversation. In the first column, I marked the film number and the viewing times where these "conversation markers" came to light. In the second column, I named specific conversation-markers with code-words like *introduction and opening question of inquiry*, *soliciting other views*, *dramatically reading the text*, *challenging question*, *playing devil's advocate*, *synthesis*, *pointed feedback*, *validation*. I used specific names of students to demonstrate the variety of voices and views in the SCS but changed their names to protect their identity. In the

third column, I made brief comments about the relative effectiveness of each conversation marker and whether and how it improved the quality of the conversation.

After creating this chart, it became clear that I needed to reflect on a few exchanges of the dialogue for a categorical analysis regarding the balance of voices and views. To this end, I decided to create a video-montage of these critical moments and conversation strategies and superpose the filmed selections of conversation with a screencast recording of myself as an observer commenting on what had been filmed.

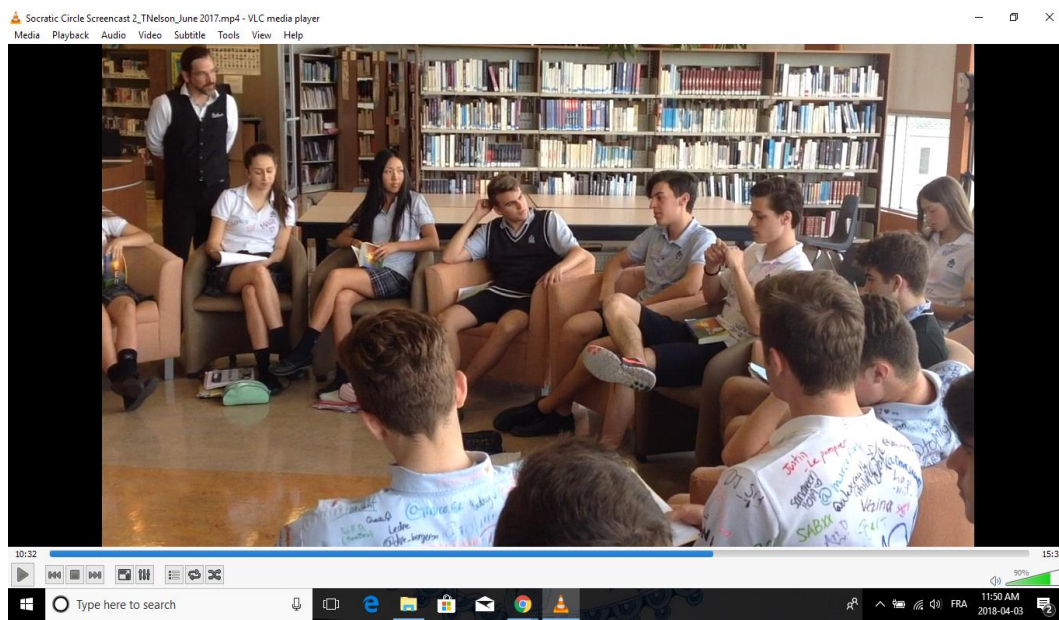


Photo-still of class 503-504 in the library with me listening to the second inner-circle.

4.2.2 Thematic Presentation of Observations on Videotaped SCSs

Video #1 timing	Conversation markers	Comments on effectiveness of strategies
0 min.	I remind students of the filmed aspect of the self-study research.	Too-long, distracts more than focuses.
1:23 min.	I introduce the question of inquiry : Is <i>Feed</i> subversive?	Rephrased the question three times! Big silence after the big question. An icebreaker could have helped here.
4:30 min.	Amalia, Lea and Sandrine define terms of subversion, identify elements of subversion and solicit other views	I nod and listen attentively as students take charge.
5:30 min.	Amanda formulates a theory , relating advances in technology to human disconnection.	Discussion warms up to several female voices; guys remain silent.
7:12 min.	Melanie and Ariane make speculations on author's intentions .	Very effective, leads to several participant voices.
9:10min.	Amalia shifts conversation with a new focus : how the novel may not be subversive.	Very effective leadership, clear shift, but only 2-3 students explore this side. First student brings us back to the subversive perspective!
12:30min .	Dana quietly formulates a new question , regarding Violet as a rebel without any power or influence. I restate and validate this question .	Effective, several students took her lead and fleshed out her argument.
14:10min .	Sandrine broadens discussion and redefines subversion .	Widens perspective on subversion.
15:45min .	Melanie makes a hypothetical observation , imagining how the	Several voices chime in here. Many new ideas.

	novel could have been even more dramatic.	
16:53 min.	I announce two minutes to close.	Effective intervention. Shifts focus on what is being learned and uncovered.
17:10 min.	Stephan synthesizes conversation with remarks about the grotesque ironies of the novel.	Powerful synthesis but one-sided.
18:00 min.	I verify the silence, signal the end and praise all participants.	Excellent, discrete and respectful.
18:23 min.	I remind outer-circle members of research problem and ask for focused and detailed feedback.	Clear, concise and effective use of body language and inclusive eye-contact.
18:30 min.	Jim, Timothy, Daniel and Mark offer pointed remarks on Amalia's ability to break the ice, shift the conversation, and lead the conversation.	Effective because pointed on conversation skills that demonstrate student ownership.
20:03 min.	I restate and validate these remarks and ask for larger consensus.	Effective. Makes observers even more responsible and thoughtful.
20:48 min.	I comment on one the larger of goals of SCSs, namely going beyond the text and extrapolating from experience.	Good. Gives the class permission to discuss wider connections with the novel.
24:15 min.	I congratulate John and thank him for restating an important aspect of the conversation.	Effective and sounds sincere.
24:48 min.	I close the outer-circle and ask students to switch places.	I realize that I should have tried to call attention to the uneven closing statement of the inner-circle. While they were able to explore both sides of the subversion-question, they neglected to sum up the

		non-subversive elements. As a teacher-observer, part of my role in monitoring the conversation consists in reminding people of aspects that deserve to be restated.
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Video #2 (25 min.)+ timing	Conversation markers	Comments on effectiveness of strategies
0-3:08 min.	I draw attention to the ending of the novel, dramatically read it aloud and ask students to interpret it.	Humorous interpretation of Titus' voice. Very effective re-contextualisation of question of inquiry: Is Titus converted by the feed or does he continue the rebellion?
3:09 min.	Dan explores an initial interpretation : the humanisation of Titus.	Ice is broken quickly and several people nod heads in approval.
4:10 min.	Anthony politely disagrees and reminds everyone of the artificial and fake nature of Titus.	Early exploration of an alternative perspective gives participants a larger view
4:44 min.	Olivier returns to initial perspective and fleshes out argument about Titus' humanisation through Violet's death.	I watch attentively as students build off and question one another. Discussion is fluid and dynamic.
5:41 min.	Anthony re-iterates alternative view of this same scene.	Very effective, because persistent, return to alternate interpretation.
6:30 min.	Sandrine supports Anthony with other examples.	I resist the temptation to intervene here and watch the differing perspectives play out.
7:30 min.	Dan explores cultural influences behind the characterisation and Natasha concurs and recasts this	Effective. New voices and supporters are coming into the discussion.

	formulation. Two others explore this.	
9:23 min.	Anthony calls into question these remarks and retorts that Titus will forget the resistance in one week.	Effective reminder of alternate view. This view is now well established and understood.
10:08 min.	I intervene here and recast this remark within the larger question of inquiry so that we don't lose sight of the SCS task: is this serious subversive literature or simply pulp fiction that will be forgotten in one week?	Effective in opening in wider perspective and engaging new participants.
10:36 min.	Dave identifies problematic issues that stand the test of time: corporate empire, hyper-consumerism, media literacy	Extremely effective because broad and concise.
11:45 min.	Olivier summarizes the drama over Violet's struggle with Feedtech.	Many heads are nodding in approval.
13:00 min.	Melanie returns to alternate view and solicits others . Sandrine builds on this : Violet as a wanna-be rebel without any influence on blind consumers. Anthony validates this.	I shake my head, happy to see this move, and resist the temptation to speak here. More support and momentum is being gathered for this side.
14:30 min.	Dan plays the Devil's advocate , expressing the view that the ending is a new beginning for rebellion and	Outer circle members are busy writing these comments down. Inner-circle members listen very intently.

	hope.	
15:36 min.	Marc formulates a new question: Could Titus succeed in unplugging the feed?	Effective. Renews participant interest and speculation.
16:01 min.	Melanie claims that all characters are enslaved, even hackers and rebels.	Provocative claim. Demands more evidence for support.
16:42 min.	Sandrine recasts initial question: does Titus really have a big enough realization of truth to be able to incite new rebellion?	Effective. Several participants say yes and one says no it will be forgotten in one week.
17:24 min.	Natasha challenges this view , pointing out the total artificiality of Titus' world.	Effective in keeping the balance of views open.
18:13 min.	I announce two-minutes to close and ask what we can take away?	Effective use of hand gestures, non-verbal communication.
18:44 min.	Alex and Mark attempt to retrace and to generalize the conversation.	They provoke laughter. Ultimately these are ineffective remarks because too general and without content.
19:08 min.	Olivier solicits interpretations on the last sentence: "everything must go!"	Good shift. People return to task more seriously.
19:30 min.	Dan interprets this in two ways: as a final triumphant pop-up advertisement from the feed and as an ultimate warning from the author.	Effective summary and synthesis of the two views. Outer circle members are taking notes. Inner circle members are shaking heads.
20:19 min.	I thank him for expressing this perspective and close the circle.	Somewhat effective. I could have pointed out that he actually captured the two dominant interpretations in this statement.
20:30 min.	I solicit feedback from the	Feedback seemed more natural and this

	outer-circle, asking who wants to start.	allowed others to gather their thoughts. Good idea to allow feedback to emerge from someone who has something to say immediately.
20:50 min.	Lea congratulates Dan and validates the optimistic view of the lone-rebel, commenting on the Hong Kong umbrella-rebellion started by a 14 year old.	Effective comment and relevant to follow-up task. Outside connections like these can be used to lead into a literary analysis and close reading of the text.
21:13 min.	Amalia points out the two dominant views and qualifies the discussion as very balanced.	I see this comment as a very accurate assessment of the conversation and reiterate the words she uses to describe the hopeful and fake perspectives.
22:06 min.	Amanda rates the group's ability to disagree in a civil way .	I validate this remark and reiterate the importance of exploring opposing views without getting heated up.
22:58 min.	David restates Dan's view on Titus and praises him for saying what he thought.	I verify this statement with the group and comment on the very fluid and spontaneous way this perspective was expressed.
23:38 min.	Stephan praises the exploration of the theme of corporate empire and consumer blindness.	I restate the significance of this theme to the C2/C3 task.
24:02 min.	Timothy summarizes the perspective about Violet's humanizing influence.	I validate this by mentioning that it may also activate a humanizing reflex in readers.
24:02-	Jim, David and Sandrine	Very effective way of wrapping things up.

25:30 min.	reflect on the productive way the conversation closed with Olivier's question.	
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4.2.3 Categorical Analysis & Screencast Commentary of SCSs

As mentioned earlier, I have produced two short video-montages of highlights from the videos commented on in the previous section. To produce a categorical analysis of these highlights with respect to my research questions, I added a screencast commentary. These audio-visual documents will give the reader greater insight into the way I think about my own work and offer a clearer view of how I conduct SCSs in my educational milieu. The reader may consult both at the following private youtube chain:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b53cobg_sYI&feature=youtu.be&hd=1;

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFEfmuxcQU&feature=youtu.be&hd=1.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFEfmuxcQU&feature=youtu.be&hd=1)

4.3 Inquiry Data: Results from Students in SCS Evaluation Forms

Getting useful and honest critical feedback from students can be tricky since they often tend to answer to please their teacher. I decided to give students some clarity about their contribution to my personal research and insisted on the words "honest" and "critical" in terms of their assessment. I also give them enough time to answer the questionnaire as completely as possible. After videotaping our seminar on M.T. Anderson's dystopian

novel *Feed* (2002), I reserved a good half hour of the following class with each of my groups and distributed the SCS Evaluation Form to everyone present. I re-iterated the goal of this Evaluation Form by reading the opening statement on the form aloud and briefly reminded students that I was collecting different types of data to get a better general understanding of how to improve the balance of voices and views expressed by students participating in SCSs. I reminded them that they had privileged experience since they had participated in up to eight SCSs this year and most of them had had earlier experience with SCSs in Secondary 3 with me as their instructor. I reminded them about the anonymous nature of the form and the importance of adding personal comments where appropriate. I did not prompt any answers and when asked, simply stated, "think and reflect on your own experience".

4.3.1 Conditions for Collecting, Coding & Compiling Evaluation Forms

I had reserved about 20 minutes to answer the Evaluation form completely, individually and in silence. However, most students completed it within 10-15 minutes. Out of 94 students, 88 completed the questionnaire, 6 being absent. Questions number 2 and 4 prompted lots of quizzical looks in all three classes and I did have to rephrase these to the whole class with simplified terms: "what hindered progress" (question 2) was recast as "what stopped you from making progress"; and "what prevented you from taking responsibility" (question 4) was recast as "what kept you from caring" about your own learning.

After collecting the forms, I began the color-coding process. First, I color-coded all manuscript remarks and comments with highlighter pens: green for praise, yellow for recurrent obstacles, blue for tips and advice for future practice and reflection. Next, I began the compilation of data. Using a blank electronic copy of the form, I transferred the manuscript data to an electronic format. Qualitative remarks were simply listed according to the three color-codes or their order of recurrence. Where remarks repeated or were phrased in similar ways, they were counted as a repeated comment and quantified. For example, comments such as "classmates watching me" or "friends giving me encouragement" or "feeling monitored by my outer-circle members" were listed as a recurrent comment under "peer encouragement, monitoring and feedback.

4.3.2 Thematic Presentation of Results

The first four questions were open in format (complete the following statements). I will list the questions and answers in order of recurrence.

1) What most helped me actively engage in SCSs was...

Number of responses	Recurrent statements
41	Peer encouragement, monitoring and feedback
29	Serious preparation (active reading strategies, notetaking)

11	Strong teaching AND/OR teacher's encouragement
7	Using the feedback forms

2) What most hindered my progress in learning how to interact in SCSs was...

Number of Responses	Recurrent statements
43	"???" OR I don't understand
31	Nothing OR blank space
13	Not having enough time for longer conversations
4	Stress felt when we were evaluated by teacher for oral interaction

3) What helped me most to take responsibility for my own learning in SCSs was...

Number of Responses	Recurrent statements
24	Being prepared OR coming to the circle with notes and questions
23	Being monitored AND/OR judged by peers
21	Taking notes on feedback form AND/OR doing Socratic Circle Reports
12	Teacher's interventions AND/OR comments AND/OR encouragements
8	Being evaluated for oral participation

4) What prevented me from taking responsibility for my own learning in SCSs was...

Number of Responses	Recurrent statements
38	"???" OR I don't understand
25	Nothing...OR blank space
22	Not wanting to look stupid OR not wanting to make a mistake
2	Not being graded OR feeling it didn't matter if I said something or said nothing

I am tempted to ignore entirely the answers to questions number 2 and 4, due to the confusion in their meaning and their abstruse formulation. 70-80% of respondents answered nothing or wrote that they didn't understand these questions. This is unfortunate since the intention was to uncover the types of obstacles students face in terms of responsible participation and engagement in their own learning. However, when affirmative responses to these questions are seen in the light of questions 1 and 3, we can draw some interesting conclusions about the overwhelming importance of peer-monitoring and student preparation for more active and inclusive participation. Remarks, comments and grades from the teacher have very little impact by comparison. I will reflect on what this suggests in the next section in categorical implications.

Questions 5-10 were formulated as both a multiple-choice answer to specific pedagogical beliefs and practices in democratic conversation, together with a follow-up

question asking for personal comments about the way students felt about the level of engagement, development or exposure. I will reframe these systematically below and indicate statistics about recurrent statements in tables below each question.

5.1) During SCSs I found the instructor was responsive to students' concerns

(75) consistently (13) occasionally (0) rarely

5.2) What are your feelings about this level of responsiveness? (4 positive statements received)

--When we noticed that only some people participated, you listened and commented on this like you really cared about everyone being involved;

--Every time we have a circle you always seem interested in hearing students continue the conversation--even after the bell rings and the furniture has to be rearranged—that's cool!

--I noticed that you often tried out new ideas to make improvements on things that people had noticed from the last circle—like giving "Jeremie" (name changed) some limits.

--I like the way you take the time to hear and to comment on what every student in the outer circle has to say.

6.1) During SCSs I found the teacher tried to get all students to participate

(69) consistently (19) occasionally (0) rarely

6.2) What are your feelings about the participation of students?

Number of students	Recurrent statements
11	<i>Generally, it's pretty good OR most students participate actively OR it's good for almost everyone, it's only a problem for certain students;</i>
9	<i>Students are responsible for this problem OR it's not the teacher's fault, this is a student problem OR students need to make classmates feel more responsible for this;</i>
4	<i>We get better and better as the year goes on OR we made a lot of progress this year!</i>

7.1) In this course I found that democratic habits of discussion (including all students' voices, creating an equal space and time for all to speak, and allowing students to express disagreement) were practiced

(66) consistently (22) occasionally (0) rarely

7.2) What are your feelings about the level of democracy during SCSs?

Number of students	Recurrent statements
13	<i>It's an excellent way to practice critical thinking in a fair and respectful way OR it's a very advanced level of democracy OR it's more advanced in this class than other subjects like French or ECR;</i>

11	<i>It's very respectful OR we respect each other even when we disagree;</i>
3	<i>We still need to work on getting everyone to participate OR we still need to improve participation</i>

8.1) In this course I found that I was encouraged to explore a wide variety of perspectives, opinions, voices and views

(73) consistently (15) occasionally (0) rarely

8.2) What are your feelings about the level of exposure to diverse perspectives during SCSs?

Number of students	Recurrent statements
9	<i>We understand better/more deeply after hearing multiple perspectives;</i>
6	<i>You do a good job at this OR you help students to look at other sides;</i>
4	<i>I like playing the devil's advocate OR I often see people playing devil's advocate;</i>
2	<i>We did this really well last time OR in the library we really practiced this!</i>

9.1) During SCSs, to what extent was the teacher clear about speech policies (rules, roles, goals, rewards)?

(80) very (8) somewhat / (0) not at all

9.2) During SCSs, to what extent was the teacher inclusive, courteous and respectful

to all students?

(83) very (5) somewhat / (0) not at all

9.3) During SCSs, to what extent was the teacher able to give students ownership of discussion?

(72) very (15) somewhat / (0) not at all

9.4) During SCSs, to what extent was the teacher able to intervene without too much interference?

(66) very (21) somewhat / (0) not at all

10) What piece of advice would you most like to give the instructor on how to conduct SCSs in the future?

Number of students	Recurring statements
51	<i>Nothing OR blank</i>
15	<i>Keep it up! OR you are doing a great job!</i>
12	<i>It's perfect as it is! OR Don't change anything!</i>
5	<i>Try smaller circles for big classes OR our class size was too big for only one inner-outer circle OR you should try to have several SCSs at the same time</i>
3	<i>Give/assign leadership to specific students to conduct/open the SCS</i>
2	<i>Use the library more often OR you should use the comfy chairs in the library more often</i>

4.3.3 Categorical Analysis of Student Evaluation Forms

Overall, I was very happy to receive such positive feedback. Whether students were giving me words of praise, noticing their own progress or reflecting on the importance of comfy chairs, these evaluation forms are encouraging on a broad level. Over the course of their studies, students notice that they are growing in their conversation skills (i.e. playing devil's advocate) and are advancing in the art of democratic dialogue in my EESL class. At the same time, where they are critical, or where there are noticeable differences in response-types, these evaluation forms are also instructive. In other words, their answers do help me to reflect on those obstacles that can be avoided through deliberate reflective teaching.

Generally, students find that my teaching practice is largely consistent with my belief in active, inclusive and balanced participation in SCSs. An analysis of the answers to questions 5-9 reveals this statistically : 85% of students found me consistently responsive to student concerns (question 5); 78% found that I made consistent efforts to get everyone to participate (question 6); 75% found that democratic habits were practiced consistently (question 7); 80% found I consistently encouraged students to explore a variety of perspectives (question 8); over 91% of respondents thought I was clear about speech policies and 94% that I was inclusive, respectful and courteous (question 9). Moreover, no students answered "rarely" or "not at all" to any of the questions. Where students answered "occasionally" this response was often followed by a comment that suggested that the responsibility belonged to students. For example, when asked to describe their feelings about student participation (question 6.2), 11 stated that it was generally good but only

problematic for certain students and 9 stated that students need to hold each other more accountable.

These results prompt me to ask myself what I do to facilitate student accountability. This is an important aspect of my research, especially with regards to a teaching practice that considers itself student-centered and "maieutic" in its approach. An analysis of the answers to questions 1 and 3 shows that students feel more actively engaged and responsible when they are preparing notes on their readings and when they are engaged in peer-monitoring and feedback. This suggests that everything I do to encourage active reading strategies pays off (i.e. buzz-groups, response journals and novel documents, preparing thesis statements to test, formulating questions of inquiry) because it gives them more autonomy. The same conclusion holds true for all my efforts in getting students to take peer-feedback seriously (i.e. directing the way outer-circle comments are given, using the feedback forms for follow-up in reports).

Along the same line of inquiry, student responses also prompt me to examine what I do to facilitate student leadership and ownership of the conversation in SCSs. 81% of respondents answered that I am "very" able to give students ownership and 19% "somewhat able" (question 9.3); 3 respondents advised me to work on this question of giving specific students more explicit roles of leadership (question 10). Clearly this is something that I can work on: for example, assigning discussion leaders the responsibility to coax everyone into the conversation, asking them to consciously monitor the exploration of multiple aspects of the issues or asking them to frame provocative and productive opening questions. This "coaching" role, to be assumed before and after SCSs

take place, does not translate into my total relinquishment of control during a seminar. Here again, it is instructive to look at students' answers to the question regarding my ability to intervene where necessary without too much intervention (question 9.4). 75% answered that I was "very able" and 25% that I was "somewhat able" to do this. This is something I have already reflected on in previous sections of this chapter and something to which I will be attentive when analyzing the memos and interview of my critical friends.

4.4 Inquiry Data: Written Memos and Interviews with Critical Friends

As I stated in the methodological discussion of critical collaborative inquiry (Chapter 3, p.39), critical friends are not just buddies. The role of critical friends in Self-Study Research is to generate new ideas and interpretations of what is going on, question the researcher's assumptions about his own practice, and participate in "open, honest and constructive feedback" (Samaras, 2009, p.75). In my case, they are trusted colleagues, pedagogical counsellors and mentors who witnessed the same classes in SCSs as those I observed myself after watching the videotapes. I will show in the following section how their critical feedback helps me to corroborate, question and reframe my own research and personal reflection.

4.4.1 Conditions for Collecting, Coding & Compiling Feedback

A few weeks before the final SCSs on the dystopian novel *Feed* (2002), I invited five critical friends to attend my classes as special invited guests, as originally planned in Chapter 3 (p.42). They received instructions about my expectations of their work as non-participating witnesses in the classroom as well as my expectations of their engagement in the feedback process. To this end, I shared a copy of my Research Proposal (chapters 1-3) as well as a copy of my 22 interview questions (Appendix B), to be used as prompts for audio-taped interviews or written memos. In addition, they were asked to give formal consent to the research process in an email that was sent out to all, explaining their role as members of a Critical Friend Team as well as how I intended to protect their professional identity by using fictional names when referring to individual comments. All accepted these conditions and attended two out of three of my SCSs. Three critical friends came to a SCS with EESL group 502-506, the class with which I face many cultural challenges; two critical friends attended a SCS in the library with EESL group 503-504, the class in which gender differences come to the fore (Chapter 3, p.41).

I scheduled an interview date at a local café the week following the SCSs and uploaded an audio-recording application to my iPad for recording purposes. For those unable to attend the live interview, I suggested they simply write down memos with their own comments and observations and asked them to formulate their remarks in the light of my interview questions and my general and specific research questions. In the end, I recorded a 56 minute audio-interview with three critical friends and received two three-page memos with the remaining two critical friends.

How did I treat this data? As planned, I transcribed the audio-recording and then examined the transcript together with the written memos for emerging themes. Several general themes emerged naturally from the interview questions as well as the format and formulation of the remarks themselves. Some smaller themes seemed to belong to a larger one; for example, I grouped together comments about "what works in the response-process" with "factors that contribute to a balance of voices and views". Once these themes were clarified through careful rereading, I decided to color-code these with five different highlighter pens. Yellow for evidence of the research problem, orange for the level of academic conversation skills, green for factors that influence the balance of voices and views, pink for strengths and weakness of pedagogical interventions and blue for tips or suggestions to explore for future animation of SCSs. Originally, I had planned to create a kind of synthetic mind-map organized by the research questions, emergent themes and supportive remarks to centralize multiple documents. I found this not to be necessary, given all the color-coding.

4.4.2 Thematic Presentation of Critical Friends' Memos & Interview

The following table presents selected quotations of the most relevant remarks or observations from the inquiry data of my Critical Friends Team; these are organized by five emergent themes (left column). I have given pseudonyms to each critical friend, offset their comments in a separate font and listed these (right column). Additionally, I have highlighted what I consider to be the most salient descriptors or comprehensive

comments within each quotation.

**1) Evidence
of the
problem**

Arielle: (colleague): The problem of uneven participation was visible in the inner-circle but what I did notice was that some of the people who didn't participate in the inner-circle did do so when prompted by you and what they contributed in terms of outer-circle feedback was outstanding!

Anne (pedagogical counsellor): There were five students in the first *Socratic Circle* who did not utter a word and no effort was made by anyone to coax them into saying something.

Maria (colleague): During both inner circles, only about a third of the students were actively participating, sharing ideas, and exploring new ones. A few more participated to give "one-liners."

Karen (colleague): In the inner circles, out of about 12 students, I notice that 6 or 7 actually spoke. Not knowing the students personally, I wondered if the quiet students were simply shy, felt inarticulate, or didn't feel that they had something worthwhile to share. Perhaps they felt that their thoughts had already been shared by others and didn't feel the need to repeat or reiterate. Once these "shy" students were in the outer circle, I fully expected them to be more reserved and even give basic and generic feedback. To my surprise, these students were quite articulate, lively, and had interesting feedback to give the inner circle students. Clearly then, the lack of participation while in the inner circle by these same students must be due to other factors.

Maria (colleague) In the group I watched I definitely felt there was balance in the exploration of different aspects of that question about subversive literature...I would say they explored it 50/50 as subversive or as not subversive...and in the end they decided that it was more subversive than not. I noticed they came back to this question several times.

Joshua (mentor): In the class I observed, I think both sides of the opening

	<p>question were explored but perhaps a little less than 50/50 since one side was explored more superficially than the other. There seemed more consensus on the side of the novel's subversive influence.</p>
<p>2) Academic conversation skills of students</p>	<p>Joshua (mentor): Now you know that I am from another school, and even though it's also a private school, it was clear to me that your students are so much more advanced... I mean just the basic structure of their language is so much more sophisticated and they were so serious!</p> <p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor): First of all, let me say how impressed I was with the two <i>Socratic Circles</i> I attended. The level of language, the depth of ideas and the critical thinking skills showcased throughout the discussions were – in my experience - comparable to those of College level students.</p> <p>Maria (colleague): I felt that they were very polite, saying I agree or disagree with you and here's why...you didn't have a lot of interruptions and they really listened to each other and they encouraged different points of view, because in a classroom situation they might put down a child and I didn't see any of that!</p> <p>Joshua (mentor): I just saw the pride that wells up inside of them when they said something that was thoughtful or deep and there was a lot of pride and respect for what had been said with all the others looking in and listening to them.</p> <p>Arielle (colleague): I also find that this is kind of communication taps into lifelong learning...we're not talking about language merely, I mean communicating deeply with other people, how to get along on a formal level and demonstrate a higher level of intelligence really takes a lot of reflection...so you're giving them a life-lesson that will continue into Cégep and university and adult life.</p> <p>Karen (colleague): I was impressed with the level of insight and critical</p>

	<p>thought that the students brought to the discussion. Although it would have been nice to see more of it, some students did not shy away from sharing opposing views and playing the Devil's advocate. The discussion remained very respectful and civil throughout--not an easy feat with a bunch of teenagers.</p>
<p>3) Factors that influence inclusive participation and balanced expression</p>	<p>Arielle (colleague): there is definitely an age-factor here, a certain level of maturity that is expected as well and finally you have to remember that this is English as a second-language for most of them... you have to figure also that you have other factors like different levels of intelligence also and when you put really strong opinionated kids who are cultured, who read more and then you put them into groups with kids who maybe don't do all of that...that creates an uneven group mentality.</p> <p>Maria (colleague): another decisive factor that made for great participation was the fact that you organized it in the library! It was really amazing because you had a lot of room and it wasn't the same kind of level of formality because you have the elevated ceilings, the light coming in the windows, the upholstered chairs and the architecture—it just brought it to another level of conversation!</p> <p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor) :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I liked that suggested expressions that could be used by the students to word their arguments were on the board for them to see and use at any time. • The feedback form for the Ss in the outer circle to fill is definitely a must and I feel that Ss used it successfully when commenting on their peers' performances and ideas. • I appreciated that both prompts were completely different; it helped the Ss to re-focus and not just repeat what the first students discussed. • Prompt for the 1st Socratic Circle: Is the novel FEED subversive i.e.

4)Teaching strengths and weaknesses noticed	<p>does it encourage teen resistance?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt for the 2nd Socratic Circle: Teacher dramatizes the last few pages of the novel with an emotional reading to convey feeling to Violet's death as witnessed by Titus. Did she die for nothing or will Titus carry on the resistance? • As you suggested, I think of these Socratic Circles as brainstorming for a follow-up C2/C3 task where students have to choose between one of two prompts. It really gives students from the outer circle an extra reason to listen attentively and to the speaking participants an additional reason to try and get as much info as possible from their fellow speakers.
	<p>Karen (colleague): For the outer circle, asking the students to evaluate the inner circle discussions and respond to it served to keep all students accountable and engaged. I would say that most of the students were attentive to the inner circle discussion. Some were distracted at times, but overall they were focused. For the inner-circle, I was impressed by how the students conducted the discussion independently by asking each other pertinent, open-ended questions.</p>
	<p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor): It is great testimony to the skill, experience and expertise of the teacher who guided and helped his students achieve those high levels. I may add that I believe the teacher's background in Liberal Arts probably contributed to his ability and success...he knows his subject very well, and is knowledgeable in many areas to be able to link topics (technology and FEED, the cave allegory, etc.) and guide his students beyond the obvious; he has eclectic and defensible views on a variety of topics so that students can look up to him and trust that they can't get away with unproved or weak statements or by just changing the subject! The teacher must create a climate of confidence for the students</p>

where they can say, "My teacher knows everything about everything so I can't fool him!"

Karen (colleague): In my opinion, your interventions were **spot on**. You set up the discussion with a **guiding question** and let the students take the lead. You sometimes **reiterated** a point someone made or **reinforced** an appropriate behaviour with positive feedback. The students were autonomous in their discussion and **your interjections served to keep the momentum and refocus students' attention**.

Joshua (mentor): One of the things you did, and one which shows that you are consciously trying to get students to open up multiple perspectives, came from your introduction to the opening question. You **gave them permission to explore both sides fearlessly** by suggesting that you could say yes or no on the question, and **you reminded them that they would be able to support that case in a future literary analysis** of the novel if they elaborated and supported their ideas in a rational way.

Maria (colleague): Yes the **explicit instruction that the goal was to look at least two sides in introduction was very clear and effective**. I remember one of the girls who was leading the conversation really got everyone to stop and now take a look at the other side of the question. That was a strong moment...so **you led them to that without having to stop** and say "okay, let's switch sides"!

Anne (pedagogical counsellor):

- Teacher's **attitude is one of intense listening accentuated by several nods of approval**. However, I suggest that the **body should always be centered instead of leaning towards one group or the other** on the

	<p>left or right so as to acknowledge the whole group and not only those who are speaking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the time you were either silent and nodding and at times, you paraphrased some of the Ss' thoughts to clarify them. To me that was good. • The Students from the second Socratic Circle got carried away on a technology tangent and I was pleased to see that you re-focused the discussion with a question re-linking it the novel. I also liked the final question you asked both groups: What did you learn? What did you talk about? I think it helps bring the whole discussion full circle.
<p>5) Ideas to explore for future SCSs</p>	<p>Karen (colleague): To increase inner-circle participation my suggestion would be to keep the inner circle small, say 6-7 students, and the outer circle bigger. This could entice students who tend to rely on others to carry the discussion to participate. They would not be able to be a wallflower and it would be less likely that their ideas be shared by more outgoing students.</p> <p>Initially, after you launched the discussion question, I immediately felt that an ice breaker would have helped to get everybody going. The ice breaker needn't be complicated...In the Socratic Circle, you could ask each student to use 1-2 words to define their view of the book, for example. Afterwards, having already heard the sound of their own voice spoken out loud in front of the group, they would feel less reserved and more likely to share their thoughts.</p> <p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor): Is there an appointed leader for each discussion or does someone voluntarily take the lead? I was wondering if it might be good idea to appoint x number of students to two leaders per discussion which would not only ensure that they speak but they'd be responsible for trying to include all their "wards" in the discussion. Receiving prompts by "their" leader like "Do you agree, Roxanne?" or "Tell me what you think about this, Sébastien..." might ensure more</p>

participation.

Arielle (colleague): I wonder if you **reverse the roles** as well? When they start in the inner-circle do they start in the outer circle the next time around? I ask because I think the second inner-circle has an **advantage--as they listen to the argument** they are reminded of a lot of details (names, events, conflicts) and by not having to come up with all of that on their own, **they have more time to consider their own opinions...and this has an incidence on the quality of their participation.**

Maria (colleague) One thing that could be done to help balance the conversation without interfering during the conversation is to **delegate a role for your top students, a role in coaching other students--without anyone else knowing**...Go up to them before the circle starts and say, "Today—don't shy away from participating but I have a special job for you, let's see if you can make this happen!" Then you can follow up on this afterwards...you know, like ask them "what was your strategy" in coaxing so-and so?

For the shy students, or the weaker ones, or simply the less confident ones who think they have nothing intelligent to say, **you could also be the coach yourself** and go up and tell them that today you want to hear what they have to say, or that you want them to lead the conversation. Even at the end, you go up to them and tell them how well they did. I know this works especially well with the boys, this kind of **immediate encouragement and informal assessment helps them to raise their self-esteem**. Sometimes that little push is all you need. We often congratulate the ones who talk all the time, but **learning how to notice the ones who are just emerging...and pat them on the back is just as important, perhaps more important!**

Joshua (mentor): I recommend that you **reward participation by writing home to parents and sending the comment to the kids. You could tell them how proud of them you were, adding how you want to see them do more of this.** You know, it might take you just two minutes and then afterwards

they will move the earth for you--some of these kids. Instead of getting yelled at by their parents, or being ignored at home, you give them a reason to celebrate and feel proud.

4.4.3 Categorical Analysis of Feedback

While transcribing, compiling and reflecting on the critical feedback I received from my Critical Friends Team, I felt at once flattered and humbled, but most of all, very grateful for their pointed and thoughtful comments and observations. On a categorical level, how do these comments help me to reflect on the general and specific questions of this Self-Study Teacher Research project?

First, these comments validate my own understanding of the problem as well as the conceptual framework behind this study. On the one hand, they all recognized the benefits of conducting SCSs in the context of my teaching second-cycle EESL students at the Académie Ste-Thérèse. Moreover, they all agreed that by conducting SCSs I help students to build lifelong learning skills in conversation, critical thinking and reader-response to interpretive literature.

On the other hand, despite my long experience with SCSs, my background education in Liberal Arts, and interdisciplinary knowledge, they also see evidence of the problem of inclusive participation. However, their remarks all converge on one point: that this problem is only manifest in the inner-circle. All noted that outer-circle feedback was not only inclusive and balanced, but also well-supported, articulate and insightful. They

appreciated the systematic way I collected comments from outer-circle members and offered positive reinforcement. In addition, they noticed the responsible way students used the feedback form and held each other engaged and accountable in the learning process.

The problem of achieving a balanced expression of views seemed to be less manifest in these three SCSs; in fact, my critical friends were impressed by the abilities of my students in respectfully adopting opposing perspectives, exploring the other side of the question of subversion and giving a fair space to the expression of alternate viewpoints. Their observations suggest several reasons for this:

- I projected conversation prompts and explicitly taught expressions that helped students to cast a new perspective or challenge an existing one;
- The culture of attentive and respectful listening, and the speech policies regarding democratic habits of discussion, had been learned and enriched over the course of many SCSs;
- I effectively introduced the goal of the conversation as the exploration of both sides of the opening question about subversive literature, leading them to this without having to stop them in the middle;
- I prompted each circle to think about both sides by using very different opening questions;

- I re-focused the conversation towards the end of each inner-circle with short questions meant to re-iterate and to synthesize what had been learned or explored;
- I had framed the seminar as a testing ground for ideas to be developed in a larger C2/C3 task (position paper) as a follow-up to the SCS.

All these factors are "within my control" insofar as they structure overarching expectations about the goals of conversation, prompts for the expression about multiple views and follow-up tasks of literary analysis. This suggests that achieving a balanced expression of views in SCSs is largely due to thoughtful teaching, planning and preparation: clear speech policies, rich choices of texts to interpret, careful formulation of opening questions, engaging follow-up tasks in which reinvestment of understanding is rewarded. I do take to heart the critical comment from my pedagogical counsellor, Anne, regarding my "leaning posture" which could be more centered and open to the whole group. Non-verbal cues like this one can be more easily corrected once recognized as an unconscious reflex.

This raises the question regarding "correctable or avoidable" obstacles to inclusive participation in the inner-circle. The tips and suggestions that I received from my Critical Friends Team to solicit more active and balanced participation are all worth consideration and experimentation. Moreover, all can be easily implemented without changing the fundamentals of SCSs. These can be formulated as a series of hypothetical "what if" questions:

- What would happen if I used "ice breaker" techniques to get conversations started?
- If I implemented smaller inner-circles and bigger outer-circles would this encourage the wallflowers to stand up for themselves?
- What would happen if I delegated more leadership within the inner-circle, assigning more active roles as "moderator" or as "speaker"?
- What would happen if I asked my top-students, without anyone knowing, to coach and to coax the shy or less confident students?
- What would happen if I paid more attention to the students who are only just emerging in their skills? Would it pay off to create more alliances with them on the sidelines as a speaking coach and even reward participation more with direct and informal feedback or emails sent home in praise of their contributions?

These questions can all be answered in the affirmative as a sound and positive step in the right direction. Once implemented, these suggestions would not change the fundamentals of SCSs; however, they might implicate a more radical change in how I take my place in the inner-circle or assert my own identity in the classroom as master-questioner and animator of the discussion group. Gains implicate losses. This might also explain why this coaching role was never really seen or given serious consideration in the past. Perhaps the so-called "sage on the stage" of inner-circle conversations was afraid to lose the spotlight to the "guide on the side"? In all honesty, I believe I have always

consistently seen myself in the light of "the guide on the side," never wanting to usurp student-directed conversations, nor afraid to "lose the spotlight" to students with whom I would be competing for attention. On the contrary, I believe in empowering students to govern their own conversations and this explains the rationale behind SCSs in the first place! Yet, after reading the suggestion from my critical friends, I have come to the realization that there are many other productive ways of playing the coaching role before, during and after SCSs.

I imagine that if I adopt a more pro-active role as a "coach" the numbers of active participants in the inner-circle will increase since they will be receiving more direct consideration from me without feeling pressured or embarrassed. What kind of coaching role is understood here? Not the kind of coach who calls all the shots, does all the pep-talking himself and sets up all the codes to be played. Rather, the coach needed is the one who tries out new techniques when the context calls for it (restructured grouping strategies, ice-breaker openers, etc.), who delegates more authority to top students, who assigns specific responsibilities to key players to moderate the goings-on of the conversation, and who plays on the sidelines of the sphere of action in SCSs through informal assessment and praise of the shy, reluctant or less-confident learners.

4.5 Observational Data: Checklists

To give more substance to the process of critical collaborative inquiry involved in this Self-Study Research project, I asked my Critical Friends team to be more than critical participant-observers. In addition, I invited them to become critical readers of the research work itself. I wanted them to enhance what Samaras calls the "prism effect" (2011, p.214) afforded by using varied data sources and multiple perspectives, allowing me at once to validate my ideas, to see alternative sides that may be less visible to me and even to alter my own view of the research process. In this section, I will relate my methods for collecting and compiling this data, give a systematic compilation of the comments, and discuss the overall quality of the research.

4.5.1 Methods for Collecting, Compiling & Coding Checklists

With a view to the recursive nature of the research involved in this project, I shared my Research Proposal (Chapter 1-3) with my Critical Friends Team in July 2017; later, I shared the results produced by the data (Chapter 4) in February 2018. I asked them to carefully read the research and to comment, as honestly and as candidly as possible, on my implementation of the Five-Foci Framework as well as on my own Data Analysis and Interpretation. They were given research assessment checklists that I had prepared (Appendix D), having adopted and adapted models proposed by Samaras in her important chapter, "Assess Research Quality" (2011, pp. 220-225).

Critical friends could simply check *Yes* or *No* and offer more nuanced remarks after the words *Developing Critique*. I received generous feedback from my pedagogical counsellor, Anne, as well as my colleague, Arielle. I compiled their answers directly in the third column of the two blank checklists, recorded the number of affirmative and negative responses given, and copied their critical comments verbatim. These comments were named and formatted in different fonts for easy recognition. Later, I highlighted the most salient descriptors and remarks, as seen in the following section.

4.5.2 Systematic Compilation of Research Assessment Checklists

CRITICAL FRIEND ASSESSMENT OF DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION¹

Questions	Critical Friend Assessment
1) Did I collect enough data?	<p><u>2x</u> Yes ___ No</p> <p>--Developing Critique:</p> <p>Arielle (colleague): Very detailed.</p> <p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor): You have a variety of different kinds of data. More is always better but you have enough to draw conclusions. I just wonder if Socratic Circles would work (and if so how and with what kind of modifications) with ES students who are less fluent in the language...</p>
2) Are my data sources	<p><u>2x</u> Yes ___ No</p> <p>--Developing Critique:</p>

and supports relevant to this issue? In other words, do they help to answer the specific research question about avoidable obstacles to balanced student participation and expression?	<p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor): Absolutely. I was especially drawn to the students' comments. From their answers, they value the exercise as an apt learning tool and also think their teacher masterminded and participated in the discussions wholeheartedly and helpfully. They are critical but overall positive. The students and some critical friends could point to some very similar obstacles to be overcome and provided similar solutions.</p>
3) Were the data types (artefacts, observational data, inquiry data) varied enough?	<p>2x Yes __ No --Developing Critique: Arielle (colleague): Multiple means of collecting and observing data.</p> <p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor): Absolutely and very specific to this kind of research.</p>
4) Did I provide a detailed, descriptive, and accurate description of my analysis?	<p>2x Yes __ No --Developing Critique: Arielle (colleague): clear and precise.</p> <p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor): Very detailed, descriptive and accurate. The many sub-titles added to the clarity. I also liked the quotes you used and inserted in your essay.</p>
5) Did you notice the same patterns and relationships as I did among the given themes and categories emerging through my research?	<p>1x Yes __ No --Developing Critique: Anne (pedagogical counsellor): Not sure if I understand what you mean so I can't answer either way...</p>

6) Do you feel that I am being open to outcomes other than those that I had expected or foreseen?	<p><u>2x</u> Yes ___ No</p> <p>--Developing Critique:</p> <p>Arielle (colleague): Humble, open to criticism & willing to adapt & implement change.</p> <p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor): Absolutely. If I may say so, that's who you are. You are always humble, honest and critical of yourself in your professional life. That's what makes you a great teacher and a thorough researcher. So yes, you are open to criticism and to change if need be.</p>
7) Do you think I am being honest about any personal bias I have brought to the study?	<p><u>2x</u> Yes ___ No</p> <p>--Developing Critique:</p> <p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor): If there was a bias I didn't see it. I know you want the Socratic Circles to work and you've put a lot of time and effort into improving them with your students over the years but that's believing in what you're doing not being biased. The study reports and explains the data; you're not manipulating it nor drawing false conclusions. So yes, you're honest.</p>
8) Do you agree with my preliminary interpretations of the data?	<p><u>2x</u> Yes ___ No</p> <p>--Developing Critique:</p> <p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor)</p> <p>Not surprised just more enlightened.</p>

CRITICAL FRIEND ASSESSMENT OF FIVE FOCI METHODOLOGY²

Focus	Methodologic al component	Questions	Critical Friend Assessment
Personal	Self-study	-Is my research	<u>2x</u> Yes <u>1x</u> No

Situated Inquiry	<i>teachers initiate and study their own inquiry in their classroom and utilize a self-study method aligned with that inquiry.</i>	<p>question clearly articulated?</p> <p>-Does the inquiry look driven and generated from my questions situated in the classroom?</p> <p>-Have I adequately described the context so readers can consider the generalizability and the implications to their contexts?</p> <p>-Does the research have immediate utility to my setting and others' work?</p>	<p>--Developing Critique:</p> <p>Arielle (colleague): You offer an approach that makes the reader want to try or adapt the SCSs.</p> <p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor): The answer is yes to the first two questions. However I don't believe that other teachers would readily be able to transfer the information and the interpretation of the data to their contexts whether they are your colleagues or not. They would need a "Handbook for Teachers Wanting to Experiment with Socratic Circles" that is shorter. More hands-on and less "jargon/university" –worded.</p>
Critical Collaborative Inquiry	<i>Self-study teachers work in an intellectually safe and supportive community to improve their practice by making it explicit to</i>	<p>-Is the exchange among critical friends in the learning community respectful, constructive and bidirectional?</p> <p>-Did I clearly explain the role critical friends play in validating the research?</p> <p>-Was it interesting to</p>	<p>2x Yes 1x No</p> <p>--Developing Critique:</p> <p>Arielle (colleague): I feel privileged to witnessing this approach & being consulted for feedback.</p> <p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor): I felt respected and valued as a critical friend and I loved the experience. I did not see evidence</p>

	<i>themselves and to others through critical collaborative inquiries.</i>	<p>play this role?</p> <p>-Do you see evidence of reframed thinking on my part as a result of critical friend input?</p>	<p>of reframed thinking on your part but only because we were not in touch lately. However, knowing you, I'm sure you adapted your teaching given the input received again because you are humble enough and honest enough to follow up to criticism.</p>
Improved Learning	<i>Self-study teachers question the status quo of their teaching and the politics of schooling in order to improve and impact learning for themselves, their students, and the education field.</i>	<p>-Did I provide evidence about the value and impact of this research project for others and myself?</p> <p>-Did I describe if the knowledge gained in this study improved personal, professional and/or program development?</p> <p>-Does this inquiry serve to inform policy and educational reform?</p> <p>-Does this inquiry inform social justice issues?</p>	<p><u>2x</u> Yes <u>1x</u> No</p> <p>--Developing Critique:</p> <p>Arielle (colleague): Most certainly.</p> <p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor): I answer yes to the first two questions. Does this inquiry serve to inform policy and education reform at higher levels such as school boards or government? Dream on!! But if teachers at large were introduced to Socratic Circles via workshops and the Handbook mentioned above, there's a chance this kind of activity might take off with many teachers in many schools. I suspect however that there'd be more of a chance of launching the idea in a more Anglophone milieu. Finally, I'm really not sure if this inquiry informs social</p>

			justice issues. I've not seen evidence to that.
Focus	Methodologic al component	Questions	Critical Friend Assessment
Transparent and Systemic Research Process	<i>Self-study requires a transparent research process that clearly and accurately documents the research process through dialogue and critique.</i>	<p>-Did I clearly explain what data I collected; how I collected them; why I selected them; and when?</p> <p>-Did I clearly explain why I chose a particular self-study method and how the chosen method allowed me to explore the research question?</p> <p>-Did I provide evidence of reflective reframing and transformative thinking?</p> <p>-Did I return to answering the research questions in my findings?</p>	<p><u>2x</u> Yes <u>1x</u> No</p> <p>--Developing Critique: Anne (pedagogical counsellor): Yes to the entire set of questions except the one about reframing and rethinking as explained in an earlier answer.</p>
Knowledge Generatio	<i>Self-study research generates</i>	-Did I provide a discussion about what knowledge was	<p><u>2x</u> Yes <u>1x</u> No</p> <p>--Developing Critique: Arielle (colleague): Your</p>

n and Presentati on	<i>knowledge that is made public through presentation and publication.</i>	<p>generated by my research?</p> <p>-Did I identify what original contributions my study will have made to the field at large?</p> <p>-Did I make my research public for review and critique?</p> <p>Did I at least make my intentions known as to how I intend to publish and present my findings?</p>	<p>exposure was vast:co-workers,the school administration, visiting teachers, conferences...</p> <p>Anne (pedagogical counsellor): You did make the research available for critique to several critical friends and colleagues. I have to answer I don't know for the other three questions; perhaps I didn't read the research study thoroughly enough... I do know however that you have given workshops at various conventions; I'm wondering if you used feedback from your attendees in this research.</p>
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4.5.3 Reflections on Research Quality

From the *Assessment Checklist on Data Interpretation and Analysis* I learned that my assumptions were right about the interest of gathering multiple types of data from a variety of sources. They allow me to see SCSs from different angles and this gives me a powerful lens with which to see what is going on. I have enough evidence to draw conclusions. I treated even the most personal data objectively, honestly and humbly. While I did not demonstrate evidence of reframed thinking in these chapters, my critical friends concur that I am open to reflecting critically on my own practice and to implement change. They know that I am earnest and sincere, that I honestly wish to make SCSs work even more

powerfully. I was struck by their statements of trust in my own professional engagement with this practice.

What have I learned from the Assessment Checklist on the Five Foci Framework? That I respected the various elements and axes of the methodology proposed. For example, my critical friends felt valued and respected as "critical collaborators" (second axis) who monitored a highly "systematic and transparent" research process (fourth axis). In terms of the first and third axes, I have concluded that my "personal situated inquiry" would be of general interest to teachers of EESL and ELA for "improved learning" were it presented in a less academic and more hands-on format. In terms of the fifth axis, I demonstrated my willingness to "generate and share knowledge" by collaborating with several colleagues, pedagogical counsellors and mentors who know that I will continue to share my findings.

As I argued in Chapter 3, section 4, this kind of data demonstrates my commitment to assessing the validity, trustworthiness and generalizability of my findings. I assert that it enhances what Pine calls the "dialogical validity" (2009) of the research process since it encourages a reflective and critical dialogue and debate among participants about the outcomes of the research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

...The problems we face as teachers are most often ambiguous and messy because of the non-technical solutions they require. Professionals expect and embrace that challenge. I also see that our self-study and our messy inquiries take us to a *wondrous field* with many interesting diversions and paths... (Samaras, 2011, p.270)

This metaphor of self-study teacher research as a journey, filled with challenges and messy inquiries, describes my own path of self-discovery. A discovery rooted less in technical solutions to complex problems and more in the opening of a field of paths. This final chapter outlines some of these paths.

5.0 Introduction

In the first part of this chapter, I would like to give a general portrait of the research findings of my self-study. Later, I would like to reflect on the larger implications of conducting Self-Study Teacher Research within my own professional life. The objective is twofold. I will discuss the most significant findings of my study, outline the implications of these findings to improved teaching and learning, and describe what still needs to be done concerning the problem I explored initially. Next, I will reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of my research and discuss what I would do differently were I to carry it out again. Finally, I will outline some complementary findings and outline the implications of the conclusions of this study to the Field of Education and Educational Reform and Policy under the QEP.

In the second part of this chapter, I will describe the impact that this Self-Study Research Project has had on my understanding of my role and my practice as a teacher. After, I will relate the process of planning, designing and conducting my research to the development of professional competency 11, *to engage in professional development individually and with others* (MELS, 2001, p.113-115). Finally, I will reflect on how this form of qualitative research and practitioner inquiry contributed to my understanding of the need for life-long learning for teachers.

5.1 Reframing Hypothesis in Light of Principal Findings

A synthetic overview of my findings affords some insightful answers to the specific research question and sub-question of my study: *How can I more effectively align my teaching practice with my belief in active, inclusive and balanced participation in SCSs? Which obstacles, among those faced in the past, can be overcome through deliberate reflective teaching?*

In section 2.3, I made some general and specific predictions that deserve to be nuanced or brought into an entirely new frame of focus. For example, initially I had predicted the need to be more assertive and less permissive while conducting SCSs. To this end, I imagined the need to be more teacher-centered in my approach before, during and after SCSs: clarifying my expectations and speech policies more; intervening more often in inner-circle discussions to regulate problematic behaviour more quickly; asking for more

pointed and varied feedback than that already being given; and finally, rewarding student participation more creatively. Surprisingly, my results only support this final hypothesis about the need to reward student participation more creatively, a subject to which I will return in the next section. My findings show that the more "authoritarian" and "interventionist" teaching role that I had imagined assuming was in fact totally unnecessary and even undesirable! Somehow, I had been short-circuiting my own better intentions about using SCSs to implement student-centered learning and encourage student-ownership. In other words, I was getting in my own way.

Comments I received from critical friends explicitly pointed out the necessity of adopting a coaching role as seen in the thematic presentation of their remarks (4.4.2). Generally, they approved of my attitude of silent nodding during a student-directed conversation in the inner-circle and noticed that students were very effective in holding each other accountable for participation. They pointed out tips for intervening outside of class or during the recess periods before and after SCSs: patting students on the back, attributing leadership-roles, sending out e-mails to parents. This concurred with the results of the categorical analysis of the "pale-blue figure" of my mandala (4.1.3) in which I had suggested that it would be possible to realign my practice with my belief when I rise above mere pedagogy and "get out of my own way" (shadows and dragon figures). My analysis of the results from student assessment questionnaires also pointed out the necessity of giving students more ownership over the conversation and giving specific students more explicit roles of leadership in the inner-circle (4.3.3). In addition, student questionnaires revealed to me the overwhelming importance of the coaching that went into student preparation before and peer-monitoring during SCSs. Finally, my own video analysis of

teaching practice (4.2.3) revealed that good coaching was already happening in the outer circle, fielding, validating, reiterating and enriching comments given, especially when minority views needed to be supported or balanced with more mainstream views. However, a different kind of presence was needed in the inner-circle, one that exercised teacher-restraint, used body language and occasionally prompted students with short reminders like "two minutes to close". Finally, I admitted that using an ice-breaker technique would have improved student participation instead of speaking so academically at the beginning.

The convergence of all these results points out the necessity of very flexible and differentiated coaching skills. I say "differentiated and flexible" coaching skills, because I don't think coaching can be reduced to mere technique since an effective teacher-coach has to adapt to the field of play in SCSs with highly creative measures: encouraging teamwork in the exploration of initial questions of inquiry, training personal development in different ways depending on student weakness and skills, coordinating tasks and responsibilities in alternate ways in both inner and outer circles, and integrating multiple viewpoints only where and when necessary. This is one of the most significant findings of my research and it has contributed to a more intimate understanding of the roles that I need conscientiously to adopt and to develop while piloting SCSs.

5.1.1 Coaching as an essential professional competency

I realize that coaching is one of the major roles assumed by master-teachers and one that I need to cultivate and to differentiate in my own teaching context. Coaching is, after all, one of the six roles described in the exposition of professional competency number 4 (MELS, 2001, 79-82): *to pilot teaching/learning situations that are appropriate to students and the subject content with a view to developing competencies targeted in the programs*. All these roles are described in a sequence of six figures and I realize that they are all important to the successful implementation of SCSs:

-the teacher as a **cultural broker**, mediating between students' knowledge and that to be learned, between popular and high culture, who induces cognitive clashes in learners through cultural clashes;

-the teacher as a **pilot**, giving and maintaining direction in learning despite obstacles, mapping out courses of action, building representations, directing attention with a keen sense of judgement;

-the teacher as an **information-dietician**, converting unfamiliar information into assimilated knowledge and knowledge into cultural practice;

-the teacher as a **provider**, selecting learning situations that are rich and open to the world, offering feedback designed to help learners adapt their actions and correct mistakes;

-the teacher as a **guide**, moderating debate, questioning validity, and highlighting key aspects of tasks;

-the teacher as a **coach**, encouraging teamwork, training personal development, coordinating tasks and responsibilities, and integrating multiple viewpoints.

I have assumed and developed all of these roles to a varying degree while conducting SCSs over my 16-year career at the Académie Ste-Thérèse. However, while conducting this research, it became more and more obvious to me that I had already developed the roles of cultural broker, pilot, information dietician, provider and guide to a high degree; conversely, after thoughtful consideration of all my data, I began to realize that I had neglected to develop my potential role as a coach. When I reflected honestly and globally on my personal artefact, observation-data and inquiry-data, I saw the necessity of looking closely at this neglected aspect of my practice.

5.1.2 Implications of Coaching to Teaching & Learning

I imagine that if I adopt a more pro-active role as a "coach" the numbers of active participants in the inner-circle of SCSs will increase since they would be receiving more direct consideration from me without feeling pressured or embarrassed.

What kind of coaching role is understood here? How would this coaching role translate

into teaching practice? Certainly not by being the kind of teacher-coach who calls all the shots, does all the pep-talking himself and sets up all the codes to be played. Rather, the coach needed is the one who tries out new techniques when the context calls for it (restructured grouping strategies, ice-breaker openers, etc.); the coach who solicits multiple viewpoints and re-integrates "minority" viewpoints that may have been expressed and later forgotten while more dominant views were being reinforced.

The implications of assuming this role would radically change the focus of my teaching practice from the front-center to the sidelines. In addition, it would mean addressing the entire class less during SCSs; rather, it would entail discretely addressing specific individuals more before and after SCSs. I embrace this realization since I know that differentiated coaching in SCSs will encourage more personal growth in the communications skills of my students. At the same time, it will afford me a new field of play before, during and after SCSs and liberate me to attend to the problem of inclusive participation and unbalanced expression with more discernment.

5.1.3 What Remains to be Done Concerning the Problem

Fundamentally, the practice of differentiated coaching would entail giving more freedom to top students and cultivating more trust in their abilities to conduct discussions. I would become the coach who delegates more authority to top students, assigning specific responsibilities to key players to formulate productive opening questions, to moderate the

goings-on of the conversation, and to monitor the exploration of multiple aspects of the issues explored. This would invariably liberate me to make more careful observations of emergent students and encourage their participation. I could become the coach who plays on the sidelines of the sphere of action in SCSs through informal assessment of the shy, reluctant or less-confident learners, rewarding students who are "emerging" in their discussion skills through direct and informal assessment or emails sent home in praise of their contributions.

I have already begun to implement this new role more consciously while conducting SCSs this year and have felt the positive impact and power of this shift. For example, where and when I have delegated roles of leadership in the inner-circle, implemented ice-breaker techniques to solicit more inclusive participation, or rewarded emergent speakers with more encouragement, the positive results have been immediately felt by students and noticed by me. I realize that I could reflect on the efficacy of my practice as I have done in this study and adjust as necessary. I see this reflective practice as ongoing work, that it would be helpful to continue to invite critical friends into the classroom to measure progress and growth, to continue to document my reflections in a professional journal, to ask students for assessment on questionnaires or surveys, and possible to film my classrooms occasionally in order to see what is going on in a less biased way.

5.2 Overview of Complementary Findings

Beyond pointing to the need for more flexible and differentiated coaching, the thematic and categorical analysis of my different sources of data has also pointed out a series of complementary findings. I will describe these briefly with reference to the evidence analysed in Chapter 4.

1) SCSs DEVELOP MULTIPLE CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES.

Without exception, all my critical friends (4.4.2) recognized the benefits of conducting SCSs in the context of my teaching second-cycle EESL students at the Académie Ste-Thérèse. Moreover, they all agreed that by conducting SCSs I help students to build lifelong learning skills in academic conversation, critical thinking, problem-solving and reader-response to interpretive literature.

2) ACADEMIC CONVERSATION SKILLS SUPPORT DEMOCRATIC CULTURE.

All my sources of data showed that the culture of attentive and respectful listening, as well as speech policies regarding democratic habits of discussion, had been learned and enriched over the course of many SCSs. Critical friends (4.4.2) noticed that the projection of conversation prompts, and explicit teaching of expressions helped students to cast a new perspective or challenge an existing one. I also noticed (4.2.3) that by explicitly introducing the goal of the conversation as the exploration of both sides of the opening question about subversive literature, students were able to pilot the conversation without

my intervention.

3) CRITICAL READING ENCOURAGES MORE LEARNER AUTONOMY.

One of my critical friends, Anne (pedagogical counsellor), told me that the depth of student reading and preparation made a lasting impression on her. She said, "everything you have done over the years to encourage active and critical reading strategies has really paid off". The analysis of student questionnaires (4.3.3) shows this explicitly (i.e. buzz-groups, response journals and novel documents, preparing thesis statements to test, formulating questions of inquiry) because it gives students more autonomy.

4) THOUGHTFUL TEACHING FACILITATES A BALANCED EXPRESSION OF VIEWS.

Achieving a balanced expression of views in SCSs is largely due to thoughtful teaching, planning and preparation: clear speech policies, rich choices of texts to interpret, careful formulation of opening questions, engaging follow-up tasks in which reinvestment of understanding is rewarded. This became clear to me after considering the triangulation of the evidence: the thematic presentation of my filmed SCSs (4.2.2) demonstrated thoughtful consideration of both sides of the question of inquiry. This in turn was corroborated by the categorical analysis of student questionnaires (4.3.3) since 80% found I consistently encouraged students to explore a variety of perspectives. In addition, some commented that this "exploration of multiple viewpoints helped them to understand the text more deeply". The thematic analysis of comments from critical friends (4.4.2) also

showed several friends observing a "balanced" or "close to 50/50" consideration of both sides of the opening question. I am encouraged by these remarks since they reveal that the ability to explore multiple viewpoints can be cultivated over time and regulated punctually by thoughtful teaching. Moreover, where and when I face obstacles to this "balanced expression of views" my teaching practice can be recalibrated through the kind of reflection and questioning I demonstrated in section 2.1.4 (Question 4).

5) I INCREASE LEARNER ENGAGEMENT BY MAKING STUDENTS ACCOUNTABLE.

The thematic presentation of student assessment on questionnaires (4.3.2) revealed that they feel "more actively engaged" and responsible when they are preparing notes on their readings, monitoring peers' interpretations, or following up on SCSs with critical and analytical responses to these readings. In addition, critical friends noticed (4.4.2) the responsible way students used the feedback form and held each other engaged and accountable in the learning process. I noticed (4.2.2) that by framing the seminar as a testing ground for ideas to be developed in a larger C2/C3 task (position paper) as a follow-up, I increased the level of student engagement in the conversation. As a result, speakers and listeners alike were more motivated to share, build, question and comment on the discussion at hand.

6) TEACHER REMARKS IN INNER-CIRCLES SHOULD BE SHORT AND STRATEGIC.

Comments from critical friends (4.4.2) as well as my own remarks in the categorical analysis of filmed SCSs (4.2.3) converged on this point. For example, they noticed that I prompted each inner circle to think deeply by using very different opening questions. I noticed that overly academic questions, instead of being rephrased and recast multiple times, could be formulated in simpler ways as "ice-breakers" to facilitate more participation. Again, critical friends and I all noticed that for the most part, I remained reserved and communicated mostly with body language (nodding in approval, holding head in hands, etc.). We all noticed that I consistently re-focused the conversation towards the end of each inner-circle with short questions meant to re-iterate and to synthesize what had been learned or explored. While challenging to students in the inner circle, this short strategic intervention on my part worked well generally, gave a sense of unity to the conversation and signaled the necessity of synthesizing key points.

7) SYSTEMATIC FIELDING OF FEEDBACK IN OUTER CIRCLE IS RELEVANT

Critical friends all noted (4.4.2) that outer-circle feedback was not only inclusive and balanced, but also well-supported, articulate and insightful. They appreciated the systematic way I collected comments from outer-circle members and offered positive reinforcement. This was also a strength I commented on in the filmed commentary (4.2.3) since I was able to do a few things simultaneously: encourage and praise speakers, reiterate "minority" viewpoints and add to the balance of their expression, as well as set-up the goals of the next inner-circle conversation. but they take peer-feedback seriously when I direct the way outer-circle comments are given, using the feedback forms for follow-up in reports, etc.

These seven complementary findings support the continued development of SCSs in my teaching context. They show that what has been accomplished, despite the problems faced, is both worthwhile and productive. Moreover, they indicate that I am already successfully practicing certain elements of learner-coaching before, during and after SCSs. This is particularly evident in the way I practice my teaching in the outer-circle and now needs to be focused on more productive ways of fostering conversation in the inner-circle.

5.3 Strengths and Limits of Research

Rereading the remarks of my critical friends from the Research Quality Assessment Checklists, I see that my work represents strong research in Self-Study: starting with a very focused definition of problem and context of study, it contextualized and situated the personal inquiry honestly and accurately. It reviewed relevant currents of theory and practice related to SCSs, defined the conceptual framework and related critical incidents in my own career that helped me to "recalibrate" my practice in an informative and engaging way. My critical friends reported that I applied the Five Foci Methodology in a relatively thorough, consistent and appropriate way. In fact, by integrating the perspectives of critical friends my work also produced what Samaras calls a "prism effect" helping "...to illuminate new ideas and show something that may be present all along but not obvious or visible..." (2011, p.214). This is particularly true with respect to the central finding about the role of coaching.

Finally, my critical friends noticed that my study used a wide variety of interesting data from multiple sources and interpreted this data in a descriptive, explanatory and unbiased way. The multiplicity of data sources and data collection methods (arts-based, observational, inquiry-based) also increased the validity of my study. As demonstrated in the previous sections of this chapter, the convergence of my results helped to corroborate, enrich and validate the central and complementary research findings.

Were I to conduct this research again, I would try to collect data from students in a more personalized way. The comments given on the assessment forms that went beyond the specific multiple choices were particularly rich. I imagine that by adding a focus group of students to the standardized assessment-form into my research design, data collection and data analysis, I would increase the trustworthiness of my findings. This is something that I will strive to do as I consciously practice more coaching in SCSs.

Some strengths also generate weaknesses. In my case, it seems that the "academic" strength of my research might make it less generalizable, and therefore harder for other teachers to transfer the information and the interpretation of the data to their contexts. In the words of my pedagogical counsellor, Anne: "They would need a 'Handbook for Teachers Wanting to Experiment with Socratic Circles' that is shorter. More hands-on and less 'jargon/university' –worded". This view does not entirely concord with my trusted colleague, Arielle, who encouraged me to publish and present my self-study as-is without delay or simplification since it would most likely "stimulate interest in implementing SCSs" in EESL or English Language Arts (mother tongue) classes in Québec. Were I to target another reading public, I would probably revise its overly academic focus and tone.

5.4 Implications of this Study to the Education Field

By using the range of tools, resources and strategic teaching techniques that I have discussed in this study for the implementation of SCSs, it is possible to make SCSs more inclusive and meaningful for all students and create more effective conditions for student-centered learning. As my self-study suggests, to maximize the full potential of SCSs for democratic discussion, a reflexive analysis of practice can be an extremely powerful way to facilitate this. Reflexive analysis of practice will reveal to teachers the roles they adopt while conducting SCSs, showing how freely, flexibly and appropriately they move from being cultural brokers, providers, information dietitians, pilots, moderators or coaches with students before, during and after SCSs.

On the level of the EESL program as defined by the QEP, this study demonstrates how long-term implementation SCSs will take students to a new level of development for competency 1, "Interacts Orally" by consolidating higher cognitive skills in academic conversation and the intellectual practice of dialogue. The potential for transferring and developing these skills in other disciplines, given in the mother-tongue, are enormous. However, for the core ESL program, teachers may find it harder to implement SCSs as fully as the EESL program, due to the developing fluency of learners.

In terms of the overarching objectives of the QEP in mobilizing and developing cross-curricular competencies, this study shows that teachers, pedagogical counsellors and

student themselves recognize how sustained engagement with SCSs develops the larger cross curricular competencies of communication, cooperation, critical thinking and creative problem-solving. Broadly speaking, the implementation of SCSs can create a rich and inclusive culture of democratic discussion where these competencies can be consolidated across the curriculum in high school and beyond.

5.5 Reflection on the Personal & Professional Impact of Research

I would like to reflect on the usefulness for conducting this research work by briefly relating some aspects of my learning in PED 851 *Projet de recherche* and PRS 800 *Essai*, especially as these aspects tie into the development of the professional competency number 11: *to engage in professional development individually and with others* (MELS, 2001, pp.113-115). Moreover, I will illustrate the development of all four features of this competency with specific examples of research initiatives that have had a direct impact on my efficacy as a teacher this year while writing this project.

1) Takes stock of his or her competencies and takes steps to develop them using available resources;

The background work of my self-study teacher-research is rooted in a kind of historical perspective of my professional development in conducting SCSs over the past 12 years. In Chapter 1 of my master's essay, I took stock of observations from my professional journal,

looked back on previous reflections, videos, conferences (Nelson, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2015a, 2015b), and put these into sharper focus with professional articles and scientific research. Additionally, this historical perspective helped me to build a new database of local knowledge: scientific literature reviewed in Chapter 2 theoretical framework re-framed to describe the problem as well as a strong methodology for data collection and analysis as described in Chapter 3. This meant significantly revising the entire focus of my previous research-work elaborated earlier in PED850 *Méthodes de recherche en enseignement*; instead of looking to build didactic materials to promote SCSs as Copeland had done (2005), I began to look at my own practice as a case-study to analyze within living educational theory (Samaras, 2011, 98. All of this work of focusing, revising, gaining perspective and rebuilding of intimate scholarship can be seen, in the words of Perrenoud, as an “exercise in professional lucidity” (1999, 155). This exercise in professional lucidity was extremely helpful to me in consolidating my identity as a master-teacher. As a result, I felt more confident in conducting SCSs this year since I had given myself a powerful point of perspective of all the things I had already done, thought, tried out, revised, discarded and sought after.

2) Discusses the relevance of his or her choices with his or her colleagues;

After reflecting on my research methodology and drafting Chapter 3, I am proud to say that I conducted core aspects of my research work in the presence of teacher-mentors and trusted colleagues in the English department, as well as seasoned pedagogical counsellors who came to one of three Seminars in the month of June 2017 as peer-observers, or to use the words of Self-Study Research, as “critical friends”. For example, time and space was

set aside for structured conversations about their observations so that the relevance of certain choices that I had made as a conductor of these conversations about subversive dystopian literature (M.T. Anderson's *Feed*, 2002) could be discussed in finer detail: inclusive practices for participation, clarity of vision and expectations, facilitation of multiple voices and views, teacher interventions, etc. This kind of critical collaborative inquiry, beyond its usefulness is giving dialogical validity to the study itself, showed members of our English Department how it was possible to work together outside of traditional meetings and create a unique kind of collegiality. By working together on special research projects like this one, we enriched our community through our "strategic collegiality" as well as our "collective professionalism" (MELS, 2001, pp.109-110).

3) Reflects on his or her practice (reflective analysis) and makes the appropriate adjustments;

I am happy to say that the general research objective (Chapter 1) and the specific research objective of my work (Chapter 2) was brought into finer focus through three successive drafts made between April-May 2017. This made it possible for me to learn more methodically from my own experience of conducting Seminars in the final month of June: documenting classroom life with videotape, fuelling my own interventions with the renewed conceptual framework that I had articulated, creating a critical incident questionnaire for student-participants that corresponded to my specific research question and thinking about subsequent actions to be carried out. This made the teaching work more deliberative and strategic since I was seeking to test out and to document the relevance of specific tools and techniques: classroom set-up, grouping strategies, speech policies, conversation prompts, buzz-groups, Socratic questioning, inclusive and detailed

feedback, and reward systems.

The self-study work I conducted was far from being a neat and sequential process. In fact, the recursive action and hermeneutic process of organising and analysing the results of my study on SCSs conducted toward the end of last year (June 2017), allowed me this year (August 2017-April 2018) to anticipate the obstacles of inclusive participation and balanced expression. It also motivated me to test out new techniques (ante-systems, ice-breakers, etc.) and to try out new initiatives and roles as the conductor of SCSs (coaching on sidelines, delegating responsibilities to moderate discussions, etc.) and continue the process of documenting my activity in my professional journal.

4) Spearheads projects to solve teaching problems;

Clearly, the very writing of this study was a project "spearheaded" to solve a teaching problem. In Chapter 2, I qualified Self-Study Teacher Research within the movement of action-based research conducted by a "reflective practitioner" (Schön, 1983) who can think while in action and who is consequently able to generate knowledge from a case-study of actions related to a recurrent lived problem in the classroom. After describing the problem of uneven participation and unbalanced expression of viewpoints in SCSs (Chapter 1), I outlined a research methodology (Chapter 3) that would allow me to collect, organize and interpret a wide range of data concerning this problem using the Five Foci Framework (Samaras, 2011). While I was teaching and using SCSs (2017-2018), I also collected, coded, compiled, thematically presented and categorically analysed personal artefacts, observational data and inquiry data (Chapter 4) from a wide range of sources and

in a variety of formats and media to generate more knowledge and insight about this case-study. The conclusions drawn from these results (Chapter 5) outline the current and future path that I need to take in practicing a flexible and differentiated form of coaching to foster inclusive participation in SCSs.

5.6 Reflection on the Need for Lifelong Learning for Teachers

It is obvious to me that good teaching practice dictates the need for teachers to see themselves as lifelong learners. In the field of research related to educational policy, there is some consensus on the premise and rationale behind this: the encouragement of teacher-learning enables teachers themselves, as "adaptive experts", to be as effective as possible in supporting the evolving needs of learners in specific contexts that face new challenges and constraints (Hatano & Oura, 2003; Williamson McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008). What does lifelong learning for teachers entail? Normally, it entails individualized training and supportive feedback that meets specific new needs, such as the implementation of technologies of information and communication in the classroom through the coaching of a "techno-pedagogical" advisor. Often, lifelong learning for teachers entails professional development opportunities for those who wish to advance their careers into new areas or for different categories of learners, or who wish to take on higher responsibilities in the administration of educational institutions. Yet again, lifelong learning can also be viewed within a framework for the progressive development of professional competencies like that proposed by the MELS (2001). I would like to reflect

on how Self-Study Teacher Research fits this latter view and offers a "grass-roots" perspective on the progressive development of professional competencies.

The European Commission on Education and Training has identified three key factors in the success of this framework for professional competency development (2013, pp.35-38). I would like to reflect on each factor in these closing remarks: 1) strong teacher engagement in the ongoing process of his or her competency development, 2) appropriate and effective assessment of the teacher's personal and professional development, and 3) the provision of career-long learning opportunities. As I will argue in the following paragraphs, my experience with Self-Study Teacher Research addresses and defines these three key factors in a very individualised way.

How can strong teacher engagement in professional competency development be stimulated or activated? My experience with Self-Study on SCSs suggests that active engagement stems from self-investment in, and self-reflection on, significant aspects of one's own practice. This requires a certain level of autonomy in the choice of one's plan for professional development. While finishing my master's essay was an "external requirement" for certification under the MES-CQ-ALS program at the Université de Sherbrooke, there was no strict plan for the definition of the research work itself. In my case, it was essential to situate my own personal inquiry in an area of teaching practice like SCSs for which I had already developed a strong knowledge-base, professional vocation and personal mission. This motivated me to mobilize all the components of professional competency 11, even in the absence of any external incentive, promotional promise or special allocation of resources.

How does one ensure appropriate and effective assessment of teacher development of professional competencies? Here again, my experience with Self-Study suggests that most effective assessment systems need to be both internal and external while always remaining personalized. External assessment systems, such as the "summative" evaluation of this essay with respect to research standards or standardized levels of competency development, are unavoidable and necessary. Yet, these external standards still focus, consider and value my own knowledge, skills and attitudes as a teacher. Internal assessment of my work involved a highly personalized process of working with my own journaling, professional portfolio, student-assessments, observations from critical friends, peer review, written reflections, video analysis, creation of artefacts, etc. It was crucial that I apply the internal assessment systems and tools that were appropriate to the needs of my own development. In my case, this involved taking stock of, and adjusting, the very conditions of my own workplace as I collaborated on a critical inquiry or case-study of my teaching self with a community of critical friends, administrators in my school, students and university research advisors. The continuous "washback" assessment that I received throughout the process was both instructive, encouraging and appropriate to the objective of lifelong learning.

How does one provide the right opportunities for professional learning? If teacher learning is to be lifelong, then it clearly needs to be envisioned as an incremental process in an educational milieu that furnishes opportunities for personal renewal, professional growth and career-advancement. In my opinion, this means more than simply 'attending a course' or going to an annual congress that offers 'one-shot deal' workshops; rather, it entails sustaining, over a longer period, a more rigorous kind of personal reflection upon

one's own teaching experience in the light of various theoretical views, educational reforms, teaching approaches, etc. Here again it is instructive to see that my Self-Study of Teacher Research on SCSs did not stem directly from a top-to-bottom technocratic approach to continued professional development. Instead, this study grew very naturally, gradually and forcefully out of the grass-roots lived culture of my school, in which my individual identity as a teacher was being shaped in a highly interactive way. The strategic collegiality and collective professionalism of my own English department has encouraged me over the years to take more responsibility for my own growth as a teacher conducting SCSs. I consider this essay to be a natural outgrowth of this reflexive analysis of my own practice, an opportunity that has empowered me with a renewed sense of purpose and leadership.

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PERSONAL CONFERENCES, WORKSHOPS & DIGITAL-RESOURCES

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APPENDIX A

LETTRE DE CONSENTEMENT

Invitation à participer au projet de recherche

Balancing Voices and Views in Socratic Circle Seminars: A Self-Study

Responsable: Tollof Nelson (Ph.D), finissant au programme de MES-profil ALS.
Université de Sherbrooke

Projet de recherche réalisé dans le cadre du cours *PRS 802: Essai*

Madame, Monsieur,

Nous sollicitons par la présente la participation de votre enfant à la recherche en titre. Cette recherche vise à mieux comprendre les enjeux entourant la participation active des jeunes à l'intérieur des séminaires de discussion (Cercles Socratiques) dans le cadre de leurs cours d'anglais enrichi. Afin que votre enfant participe à ce projet, nous avons besoin non seulement de son accord, mais aussi du vôtre.

En quoi consiste le projet?

En collaboration avec l'enseignant d'anglais enrichi de votre enfant, M. Tollof Nelson (Ph.D), des activités pédagogiques particulières seront menées en classe au cours de la fin de l'année 2017. Ces activités sont en cohérence avec le nouveau programme de l'école québécoise et respecteront le contexte normal de la classe. Ces activités seront filmées également afin d'aider à l'analyse des données. De plus, le déroulement des activités et leur effet sur l'apprentissage seront observés par l'étudiant et commentés sur des formulaires d'auto-évaluation.

Qu'est-ce que mon enfant aura à faire?

Votre enfant sera simplement invité à **participer à ces activités en classe, comme à l'habitude**. Si vous et votre enfant acceptez de participer au projet de recherche, la

seule différence sera que votre enfant sera observé et filmé au sein de son équipe de travail.

Y-a-t-il des risques, inconvénients ou bénéfices?

Il n'y a **pas de risques associés** à la participation de votre enfant à ce projet. Votre enfant ne sera pas jugé pour sa compétence en anglais. Aussi, il n'y a aucun lien entre ce projet de recherche et l'évaluation de votre enfant en EESL. La contribution à l'avancement des connaissances au sujet de l'équilibre des voix et perspectives dans des Séminaires de discussion ou « Cercles Socratiques » ainsi que l'étude des conditions favorables à l'implantation de la nouvelle réforme au secondaire sont les bénéfices directs prévus. Dans les bénéfices possibles, il se peut aussi que les activités proposées aident votre enfant à mieux développer des compétences transversales, soit la capacité de communiquer de façon appropriée ou d'utiliser son jugement critique.

Qu'est-ce que l'étudiant fera avec les vidéos et renseignements obtenus dans ce projet?

Les données recueillies par cette étude sont entièrement confidentielles et ne pourront en aucun cas mener à l'identification de votre enfant. Par exemple, son auto-évaluation sera prise en considération de façon anonyme afin de protéger son identité et un « chiffre identifiant » sera utilisé au lieu de son nom. D'autres données recueillies (vidéos, notes du chercheur, renseignements du dossier de votre enfant) seront conservées sous la responsabilité de l'étudiant. **Seuls l'étudiant, l'enseignant de votre enfant, quelques collaborateurs professionnels (« Critical Friends ») ainsi que les responsables du cours PRS 802 auront accès aux données.** Les autres membres du personnel de l'école n'y auront pas accès. Les vidéos et les renseignements tirés du dossier de votre enfant seront détruits au plus tard un an après la fin du projet. Les résultats du projet seront diffusés dans des articles professionnels et des communications dans des colloques professionnels. Les résultats généraux seront aussi présentés au personnel de l'école.

Mon enfant est-il obligé de participer?

Votre enfant est totalement **libre de participer ou non à cette étude**. Vous êtes également libre d'accepter ou non que votre enfant participe. De plus, sa décision de participer ou non à cette étude n'affectera en rien les services reçus. Votre accord nous aidera à mieux comprendre les obstacles évitables à la participation au dialogue socratique et ainsi proposer des pistes d'amélioration de l'enseignement d'EESL.

Quoi faire si j'ai des questions concernant le projet?

Ce projet a été revu et approuvé par les responsables du cours PRS 802, et l'enseignant de votre enfant. Cette démarche vise à assurer la **protection des participantes et participants**.

Si vous avez des questions concernant ce projet de recherche, n'hésitez pas à communiquer avec l'enseignant en EESL, M. Tollof Nelson (Ph.D) : 450-434-1130 (poste 270), tnelson@académie.ste-therese.com.

Tollof Nelson

M. Tollof Nelson, enseignant en EESL à l'Académie Ste-Thérèse

MES, Faculté d'éducation. Université de Sherbrooke

*J'ai lu et compris la lettre de consentement au sujet du projet **Balancing Voices and Views in Socratic Circle Seminars : A Self-Study**. J'ai compris les conditions, les risques et les bienfaits de la participation de mon enfant. J'ai obtenu des réponses aux questions que je me posais au sujet de ce projet. J'accepte librement que mon enfant participe à ce projet de recherche.*

J'autorise l'étudiant à observer et à filmer mon enfant lors des activités pédagogiques en EESL : oui ☐ non ☐

[illegible]

J'autorise l'étudiant à compiler les données recues de l'auto-évaluation de mon

enfant : oui ☐ ☐ non ☐ ☐

Parent ou tuteur de _____ (nom de l'élève)

Signature du parent ou tuteur :

Signature du jeune :

Nom : _____ Nom : _____

Date : _____ Date : _____

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions for Critical Friend Team

Following observations of three SCSs in June 2017

(to be used as prompts for audio-taped interviews or written memos)

- 1) After reading the first three chapters of the master's essay (description of the problem, conceptual framework, methodology) do you have any questions for me?
- 2) In the SCS you observed, did you actually "see" the problem I have described about unbalanced participation and expression of multiple perspectives?
- 3) How did the problem manifest itself specifically? If it did not, did you actually notice balanced and even contributions throughout the conversation or only punctually?
- 4) In your opinion, is this problem one that can ever be completely "solved"?
- 5) What aspects of the problem do you think can be attenuated or minimized with strategic teaching?
- 6) What do you think are the major obstacles to balanced participation and exploration of perspectives?
- 7) In your opinion, are there related adjacent issues that you think I can control before, during or after the seminar?
- 8) What general observations can you make about student participation?
- 9) Did you notice students delving into multiple multiple aspects of the question about subversive literature? Can you offer some explanation of why it did or did not work?
- 10) Did you feel that my speech policy and expectations for balanced participation and the expression of multiple viewpoints were clear and understood?
- 11) What did I do to reinforce these policies and expectations? Is there something I could be doing that I did not do?

- 12) Did you feel that my emphasis on prompts for academic conversation helped and was taken seriously (expressing multiple viewpoints)?
- 13) Did my opening questions stimulate discussion during both inner-circles?
- 14) What positive or negative things did you notice about the way I animated the inner-circles?
- 15) What positive or negative things did you notice about the way I animated the outer-circles?
- 16) Is it a good idea to field comments systematically from the outer-circle the way I did? Why or why not?
- 17) Did you feel that I intervened too much, just enough, or not enough? Explain.
- 18) Did you feel that I included all participants and created the conditions for an inclusive discussion?
- 19) What do you think can be done to motivate reluctant or timid speakers to speak up?
- 20) Did you notice any speaking patterns emerging in terms of gender or culture, clans or outsiders, introverts or extroverts?
- 21) Can you offer any suggestions or ideas about ways to reward participation, outside of graded evaluation?
- 22) Do you have any final remarks to make to me that were not covered by these questions?

APPENDIX C

SOCRATIC CIRCLE EVALUATION FORM⁵

This form is designed to help your EESL teacher gain a better understanding of how he is assisting your learning and how he might improve his teaching. Please answer each question as honestly as possible. Your anonymity is assured.

Please complete the following statements.

- 1) What most helped me engage actively in Socratic Circle Seminars (SCSs) was...

- 2) What most hindered my progress in learning how to interact in SCSs was...

- 3) What helped me most to take responsibility for my own learning in SCSs was...

- 4) What prevented me from taking responsibility for my own learning in SCSs was...

Please respond by circling one of the responses and add some personal comment.

- 5) During SCSs I found that the instructor was responsive to students' concerns (*circle one*) consistently / occasionally / rarely. What are your feelings about this level of responsiveness?

⁵ This evaluation form was inspired by, and adapted from, Brookfield and Preskill's *Course Evaluation Form* (1999, p. 283-284). It was given to students as a follow-up to their final SCS of the third term, in June 2017. Evaluation forms were anonymous ; instead of naming individuals, the forms were simply numbered (1-88 ; 6 absent).

- 6) During SCSs I found that the teacher tried to get all students to participate (*circle one*) consistently / occasionally / rarely. What are your feelings about the participation of students?
-
- 7) In this course I found that democratic habits of discussion (including all students' voices, creating an equal place space and time for all to speak, and allowing students to express disagreement) were practiced (*circle one*) consistently / occasionally / rarely. What are your feelings about the level of democracy during SCSs?
-
- 8) In this course I found that I was encouraged to explore a variety of perspectives, opinions, voices and views (*circle one*) consistently / occasionally / rarely. What are your feelings about the level of exposure to diverse perspectives during SCSs?
-
- 9) During SCSs, to what extent was the teacher...(please circle one response for each question)
- | | |
|---|--------|
| -Clear about speech policies (rules, roles, goals, rewards)? | very / |
| somewhat / not at all | |
| -Inclusive, courteous and respectful to all students? | very / |
| somewhat / not at all | |
| -Able to give students ownership of discussion? | very / |
| somewhat / not at all | |
| -Able to intervene where necessary without too much interference? | very / |
| somewhat / not at all | |
- 10) What piece of advice would you most like to give the instructor on how to conduct SCSs in the future?
-

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH ASSESSMENT CHECKLISTS

CRITICAL FRIEND ASSESSMENT OF DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION⁶

Note: Please complete the following checklist after reading through the chapters touching on my data analysis and interpretation. Your candid and honest assessment is appreciated. Simply check **✓Yes** or **✓No** after each question and offer any critical remarks after the words *–Developing Critique*.

Questions	Critical Friend Assessment
1) Did I collect enough data?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No --Developing Critique:
2) Are my data sources and supports relevant to this issue? In other words, do they help to answer the specific research question about avoidable obstacles to balanced student participation and expression?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No --Developing Critique:
3) Were the data types (artefacts, observational data, inquiry data) varied enough?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No --Developing Critique:
4) Did I provide a detailed, descriptive, and accurate description of my analysis?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No --Developing Critique:

⁶ The following checklist is an adapted version of the *Critical Friend Inquiry (Research Memo 3)* which can be found in Samaras's discussion of the Assessment of Research Quality through Critical Friends (2011, 215).

5) Did you notice the same patterns and relationships as I did among the given themes and categories emerging through my research?	__ Yes __ No --Developing Critique:
6) Do you feel that I am being open to outcomes other than those that I had expected or foreseen?	__ Yes __ No --Developing Critique:
7) Do you think I am being honest about any personal bias I have brought to the study?	__ Yes __ No --Developing Critique:
8) Do you agree with my preliminary interpretations of the data?	__ Yes __ No --Developing Critique:

CRITICAL FRIEND ASSESSMENT OF FIVE FOCI METHODOLOGY⁷

Note: Please complete the following checklist after reading through the preliminary copy of my master's essay. Your candid and honest assessment is appreciated. The questions are *prompts* and do not need to be systematically answered. Simply check **✓Yes** or **✓No** after those questions that apply and offer any critical remarks after the words *--Developing Critique*.

⁷ The following checklist is an adapted and abbreviated version of the *Critical Friend Inquiry (Research Guidepost)* which also can be found in Samaras's discussion of the Assessment of Research Quality through Critical Friends (2011, 222-225). Before asking my Critical Friend Team to respond to these questions, I intend to use it reflexively as a self-assessment of my own work and I will share it with them.

Focus	Methodological component	Questions	Critical Friend Assessment
Personal Situated Inquiry	<i>Self-study teachers initiate and study their own inquiry in their classroom and utilize a self-study method aligned with that inquiry.</i>	-Is my research question clearly articulated? -Does the inquiry look driven and generated from my questions situated in the classroom? -Have I adequately described the context so readers can consider the generalizability and the implications to their contexts? -Does the research have immediate utility to my setting and others' work?	__ Yes __ No -- Developing Critique:
Critical Collaborative Inquiry	<i>Self-study teachers work in an intellectually safe and supportive community to improve their practice by making it explicit to themselves and to others through critical collaborative inquiries.</i>	-Is the exchange among critical friends in the learning community respectful, constructive and bidirectional? -Did I clearly explain the role critical friends play in validating the research? -Was it interesting to play this role? -Do you see evidence of reframed thinking on my part as a result of critical friend input?	__ Yes __ No -- Developing Critique:
Improved Learning	<i>Self-study teachers question the status quo of their teaching and the politics of</i>	-Did I provide evidence about the value and impact of this research project for others and myself? -Did I describe if the knowledge gained in	__ Yes __ No -- Developing

	<i>schooling in order to improve and impact learning for themselves, their students, and the education field.</i>	this study improved personal, professional and/or program development? -Does this inquiry serve to inform policy and educational reform? -Does this inquiry inform social justice issues?	Critique:
Focus	Methodological component	Questions	Critical Friend Assessment
Transparent and Systemic Research Process	<i>Self-study requires a transparent research process that clearly and accurately documents the research process through dialogue and critique.</i>	-Did I clearly explain what data I collected; how I collected them; why I selected them; and when? -Did I clearly explain why I chose a particular self-study method and how the chosen method allowed me to explore the research question? -Did I provide evidence of reflective reframing and transformative thinking? -Did I return to answering the research questions in my findings?	__ Yes __ No -- Developing Critique:
Knowledge Generation and Presentation	<i>Self-study research generates knowledge that is made public through presentation and publication.</i>	-Did I provide a discussion about what knowledge was generated by my research? -Did I identify what original contributions my study will have made to the field at large? -Did I make my research public for review and critique?	__ Yes __ No -- Developing Critique:

		Did I at least make my intentions known as to how I intend to publish and present my findings?	
--	--	--	--